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THE BEST OF
OMNI
SCIENCE FICTION NO. 2

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EDITION

FIRST PUBLICATION OF ROBERT SILVERBERG'S NOVELLA
"WAITING FOR THE EARTHQUAKE," A HUGO AWARD-WINNER BY
GEORGE R. R. MARTIN, PLUS: ORSON SCOTT CARD,
ARTHUR C. CLARKE, SUZY MCKEE CHARNAS,
ROBERT SHECKLEY AND THEODORE STURGEON.
EDITED BY BEN BOVA AND DON MYRUS



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OMNI SOCIETY

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Cover portrait by Fred-Jurgen Rogner

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This is our second *Omni* anthology, and it comes at the end of our second year of publication. *Omni* is the newest of science-fiction magazines, a unique mixture of fact, fiction, and brilliant graphics. There have been many changes since Hugo Gernsback began it all with *Amazing Stories* in 1926. During the Twenties and early Thirties, pulp magazines proliferated. Stylistically, it was a naive period, and science fiction was entranced by the simple dramatic possibilities of action in exotic places. Then *Astounding Science Fiction*, under John W. Campbell, brought a degree of sophistication and a more advanced sense of story values. Campbell's stories reflected a fascination with technology and with the promise of man's future through technology. In the 1950s H. L. Gold's *Galaxy* came along with a social and satirical slant, an emphasis upon human values, a taste for satire, and a technique of straight-line extrapolation of current trends carried into the future.

All fiction, and particularly science fiction, reflects the mood and sensibility of its times. The newer science fiction is characterized by a greater thoughtfulness about the human situation. Although factually based, there is no longer a naive fascination with gadgetry for its own sake, no longer a belief that technology alone can save us.

Before the Eighties, we lived on an apparently inexhaustible earth; now the end of our resources is in sight. Pollution, a minor concern before, is of major importance now. American hegemony in space, once taken for granted, is now uncertain as the Russians move ahead of us in the exploration of space.

The newer science fiction comes about in response to our situation in the Eighties. But this is not all. Science fiction is not simply a gloss on present-day trends. In the realm of pure imagination, too, there are new possibilities, new worlds to explore.

A new magazine such as *Omni* attracts a new and larger audience for science fiction, and this in turn induces writers to take the next step in theme and style. We are publishing stories that respond to the special mood of our times, as writers reflect on today's special situations. This process continues under fiction writers with tastes as different as Ben Bova's and mine. The writers themselves are responding to the opportunity that *Omni* presents.

The 16 stories presented here cover a variety of situations, possibilities, styles, moods, and approaches. Altogether, I believe, they make up a collection you will want to savor and to save.

—ROBERT SHECKLEY





THE WAY OF CROSS AND DRAGON

*Across the stars
he fought against heresy.*

BY GEORGE R. R. MARTIN

Heresy," he told me. The brackish waters of his pool sloshed gently.

"Another one?" I said wearily. "There are so many these days."

My Lord Commander was displeased by that comment. He shifted position heavily, sending ripples up

PAINTING BY BOB VENOSA

and down the pool. One broke over the side, and a sheet of water slid across the tiles of the receiving chamber. My boots were soaked yet again. I accepted that philosophically. I had worn my worst boots, well aware that wet feet are among the inescapable consequences of paying call on Torgathon Nine-Klariis Tûn, elder of the ka-Thane people, and also Archbishop of Vess, Most Holy Father of the Four Vows, Grand Inquisitor of the Order Militant of the Knights of Jesus Christ, and counselor to His Holiness Pope Daryn XXI of New Rome.

"Be there as many heresies as stars in the sky, each single one is no less dangerous, Father," the archbishop said solemnly. "As Knights of Christ, it is our ordained task to fight them one and all. And I must add that this new heresy is particularly foul."

"Yes, my Lord Commander," I replied. "I did not intend to make light of it. You have my apologies. The mission to Finnegan was most taxing. I had hoped to ask you for a leave of absence from my duties. I need rest, a time for thought and restoration."

"Rest?" The archbishop moved again in his pool, only a slight shift of his immense bulk, but it was enough to send a fresh sheet of water across the floor. His black, pupilless eyes blinked at me. "No, Father, I am afraid that is out of the question. Your skills and your experience are vital for this new mission." His bass tones seemed to soften somewhat then. "I have not had time to go over your reports on Finnegan," he said. "How did your work go?"

"Badly," I told him, "though ultimately I think we will prevail. The Church is strong on Finnegan. When our attempts at reconciliation were rebuffed, I put some standards into the right hands, and we were able to shut down the heretics' newspaper and broadcasting facilities. Our friends also made certain that their legal actions came to nothing."

"That is not badly," the archbishop said. "You won a considerable victory for the Lord and the Church."

"There were riots, my Lord Commander," I said. "More than a hundred of the heretics were killed, and a dozen of our own people. I fear there will be more violence before the matter is finished. Our priests are attacked if they so much as enter the city where the heresy has taken root. Their leaders risk their lives if they leave that city. I had hoped to avoid such hatreds, such bloodshed."

"Commendable, but not realistic," said Archbishop Torgathon. He blinked at me again, and I remembered that among people of his race blinking is a sign of impatience. "The blood of martyrs must sometimes be spilled, and the blood of heretics as well. What matters if a being surrenders his life, so long as his soul is saved?"

"Indeed," I agreed. Despite his impatience, Torgathon would lecture me for another hour if given a chance. That prospect dismayed me. The receiving chamber was not designed for human comfort, and I did not wish to remain any longer than necessary. The walls were damp and moldy,

the air hot and humid and thick with the rancid-butter smell characteristic of the ka-Thane. My collar was chafing my neck raw. I was sweating beneath my cassock, my feet were thoroughly soaked, and my stomach was beginning to churn.

I pushed ahead to the business at hand. "You say this new heresy is unusually foul, my Lord Commander?"

"It is," he said.

"Where has it started?"

"On Arion, a world some three weeks' distance from Vess. A human world entirely. I cannot understand why you humans are so easily corrupted. Once a ka-Thane has found the faith, he would scarcely abandon it."

"That is well known," I replied politely. I did not mention that the number of ka-Thane to find the faith was vanishingly small. They were a slow, ponderous people, and most of their vast millions showed no interest in learning any ways other than their own, or following any creed but their

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own ancient religion. Torgathon Nine-Klariis Tûn was an anomaly. He had been among the first converts almost two centuries ago, when Pope Vidas L had ruled that nonhumans might serve as clergy. Given his great life span and the iron certainty of his belief, it was no wonder that Torgathon had risen as far as he had, despite the fact that fewer than a thousand of his race had followed him into the Church. He had at least a century of life remaining to him. No doubt he would someday be Torgathon Cardinal Tûn, should he squelch enough heresies. The times are like that.

"We have little influence on Arion," the archbishop was saying. His arms moved as he spoke, four ponderous clubs of mottled green-gray flesh churning the water, and the dirty white cilia around his breathing hole trembled with each word. "A few priests, a few churches, some believers, but no power to speak of. The heretics already outnumber us on this world. I rely on your intellect, your shrewdness. Turn this calamity into an opportunity. This heresy is so palpable that you can easily disprove it. Perhaps some of the deluded will turn to the true way."

"Certainly," I said. "And the nature of this heresy? What must I disprove?" It is a sad indication of my own troubled faith to add that I did not really care. I have dealt with too many heresies. Their beliefs and their questionings echo in my head and trouble my dreams at night. How can I be sure of my own faith? The very edict that had admitted Torgathon into the clergy had caused a half-dozen worlds to repudiate the Bishop of New Rome, and those who had followed that path would find a particularly ugly heresy in the massive naked (save for a damp Roman collar) alien who floated before me and wielded the authority of the Church in four great webbed hands. Christianity is the greatest single human religion, but that means little. The non-Christians outnumber us five to one, and there are well over seven hundred Christian sects, some almost as large as the One True Interstellar Catholic Church of Earth and the Thousand Worlds. Even Daryn XXI, powerful as he is, is only one of seven to claim the title of Pope. My own belief was strong once, but I have moved too long among heretics and nonbelievers, and even my prayers do not make the doubts go away now. So it was that I felt no horror—only a sudden intellectual interest—when the archbishop told me the nature of the heresy on Arion.

"They have made a saint," he said, "out of Judas Iscariot."

As a senior in the Knights Inquisitor, I command my own starship, which it pleases me to call *Truth of Christ*. Before the craft was assigned to me, it was named the *St. Thomas*, after the apostle, but I did not feel a saint notorious for doubting was an appropriate patron for a ship enlisted in the fight against heresy. I have no duties aboard the *Truth*, which is crewed by six brothers and sisters of the Order of St. Christopher the Far-Travelling and captained by a young woman I hired away from a merchant trader.

I was therefore able to devote the entire three-week voyage from Vess to Arion to a study of the heretical Bible, a copy of which had been given to me by the archbishop's administrative assistant. It was a thick, heavy, handsome book, bound in dark leather, its pages edged with gold leaf, with many splendid interior illustrations in full color with holographic enhancement. Remarkable work, clearly done by someone who loved the all-but-forgotten art of bookmaking. The paintings reproduced inside—the originals were to be found on the walls of the House of St. Judas on Arion, I gathered—were masterful, if blasphemous, as much high art as the Tammerwens and RoHallidays that adorn the Great Cathedral of St. John on New Rome.

Inside, the book bore an imprimatur indicating that it had been approved by Lukyan Judasson, First Scholar of the order of St. Judas Iscariot.

It was called *The Way of Cross and Dragon*.

I read it as the *Truth of Christ* slid between the stars, at first taking copious notes to better understand the heresy that I must fight, but later simply absorbed by the strange, convoluted, grotesque story it told. The words of the text had passion and power and poetry.

Thus it was that I first encountered the striking figure of St. Judas Iscariot, a complex, ambitious, contradictory, and altogether extraordinary human being.

He was born of a whore in the fabled ancient city-state of Babylon on the same day that the Savior was born in Bethlehem, and he spent his childhood in the alleys and gutters, selling his own body when he had to, pimping when he became older. As a youth, he began to experiment with the dark arts, and before the age of twenty he was a skilled necromancer. That was when he became Judas the Dragon-Tamer, the first and only man to bend to his will the most fearsome of God's creatures, the great winged fire lizards of Old Earth. The book held a marvelous painting of Judas in some great dank cavern, his eyes aflame as he wielded a glowing lash to keep at bay a mountainous green-gold dragon. Beneath his arm is a woven basket, its lid slightly ajar, and the tiny scaled heads of three dragon chicks are peering from within. A fourth infant dragon is crawling up his sleeve. That was in the first chapter of his life.

In the second, he was Judas the Conqueror, Judas the Dragon-King, Judas of Babylon, the Great Usurper. Astride the greatest of his dragons, with an iron crown on his head and a sword in his hand, he made Babylon the capital of the greatest empire Old Earth had ever known, a realm that stretched from Spain to India. He reigned from a dragon throne amid the Hanging Gardens he had caused to be constructed, and it was there he sat when he tried Jesus of Nazareth, the troublemaking prophet who had been dragged before him bound and bleeding. Judas was not a patient man, and he made Christ bleed still more before he was through with Him. And when Jesus would not answer his questions, Judas—contemptuous—had Him cast back out into the streets. But first Judas ordered his guards to cut off Christ's legs. "Healer," he said, "heal thyself."

Then came the Repentance, the vision in the night, and Judas Iscariot gave up his crown and his dark arts and his riches, to follow the man he had crippled. Despised and taunted by those he had tyrannized, Judas became the Legs of the Lord, and for a year he carried Jesus on his back to the far corners of the realm he had once ruled. When Jesus did finally heal Himself, then Judas walked at His side, and from that time forth he was Jesus' trusted friend and counselor, the first and foremost of the Twelve. Finally, Jesus gave Judas the gift of tongues, recalled and sanctified the dragons that Judas had sent away, and sent his disciple forth on a solitary ministry across the oceans, "to spread My Word where I

cannot go."

There came a day when the sun went dark at noon and the ground trembled, and Judas swung his dragon around on ponderous wings and flew back across the raging seas. But when he reached the city of Jerusalem, he found Christ dead on the cross.

In that moment his faith faltered, and for the next three days the Great Wrath of Judas was like a storm across the ancient world. His dragons razed the Temple in Jerusalem and drove the people from the city and struck as well at the great seats of power in Rome and Babylon. And when he found the others of the Twelve and questioned them and learned of how the one named Simon-called-Peter had three times betrayed the Lord, he strangled Peter with his own hands and fed the corpse to his dragons. Then he sent those dragons forth to start fires throughout the world, funeral pyres for Jesus of Nazareth.

So Jesus called back the dragons, and they came, and everywhere the fires went out. And from their bellies he called forth Peter and made him whole again, and gave him dominion over the Church.

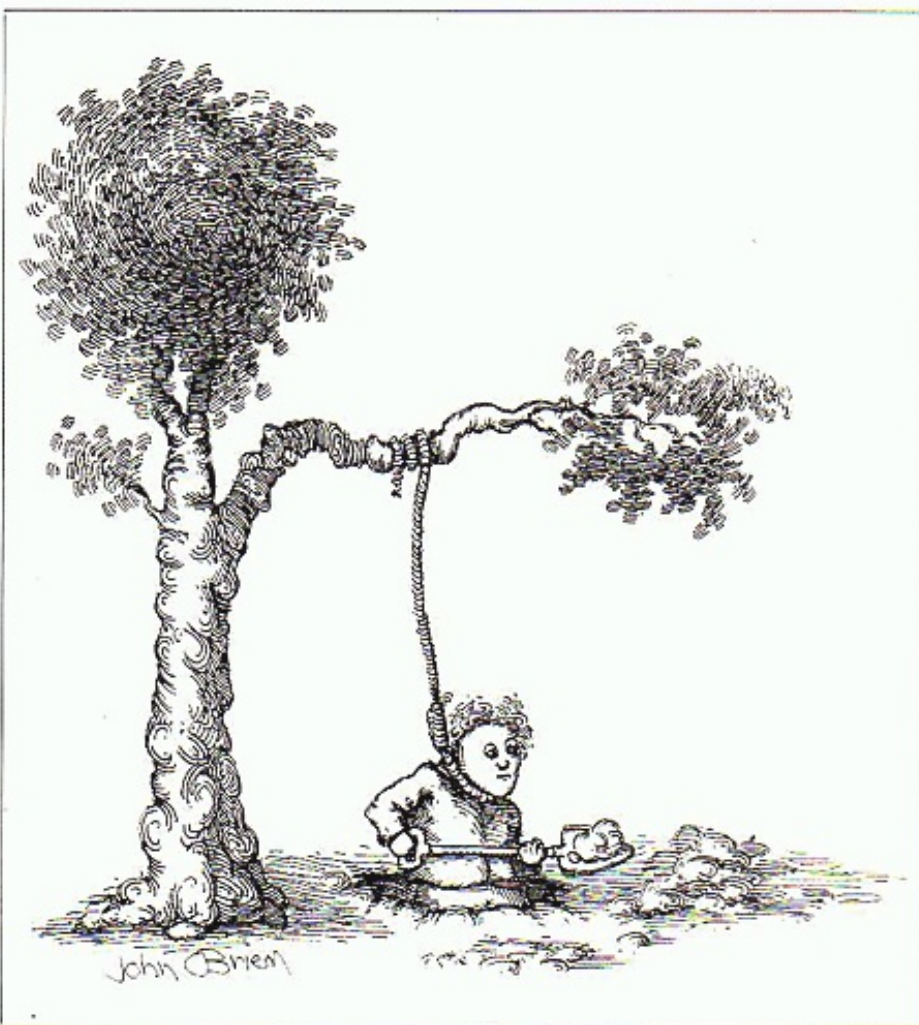
Then the dragons died, and so, too, did all dragons everywhere, for they were the living sigil of the power and wisdom of Judas Iscariot, who had sinned greatly. And He took from Judas the gift of tongues

and the power of healing He had given, and even his eyesight, for Judas had acted as a man blind (there was a fine painting of the blinded Judas weeping over the bodies of his dragons). And He told Judas that for long ages he would be remembered only as Betrayer, and people would curse his name, and all that he had been and done would be forgotten.

But then, because Judas had loved Him so, Christ gave him a boon, an extended life, during which he might travel and think on his sins and finally come to forgiveness, and only then die.

And that was the beginning of the last chapter in the life of Judas Iscariot, but it was a very long chapter indeed. Once Dragon-King, once the friend of Christ, now he became only a blind traveler, outcast and friendless, wandering all the cold roads of the earth, living even when all the cities and people and things he had known were dead. And Peter, the first Pope and ever his enemy, spread far and wide the tale of how Judas had sold Christ for thirty pieces of silver, until Judas dared not even use his true name. For a time he called himself just Wandering Ju', and afterward many other names.

He lived more than a thousand years, and became a preacher, and a healer, and a lover of animals, and was hunted and persecuted when the Church that Peter



had founded became bloated and corrupt. But he had a great deal of time, and at last he found wisdom and a sense of peace, and finally Jesus came to him on a long-postponed deathbed, and they were reconciled, and Judas wept once again. And before he died, Christ promised that He would permit a few to remember who and what Judas had been, and that with the passage of centuries the news would spread, until finally Peter's Lie was displaced and forgotten.

Such was the life of St. Judas Iscariot, as related in *The Way of Cross and Dragon*. His teachings were there as well, and the apocryphal books that he had allegedly written.

When I had finished the volume, I lent it to Arla-k-Bau, the captain of the *Truth of Christ*. Arla was a gaunt, pragmatic woman of no particular faith, but I valued her opinion. The others of my crew, the good sisters and brothers of St. Christopher, would only have echoed the archbishop's religious horror.

"Interesting," Arla said when she returned the book to me.

I chuckled. "Is that all?"

She shrugged. "It makes a nice story. An easier read than your Bible, Damien, and more dramatic as well."

"True," I admitted. "But it's absurd. An unbelievable tangle of doctrine, apocrypha, mythology, and superstition. Entertaining, yes, certainly. Imaginative, even daring. But ridiculous, don't you think? How can you credit dragons? A legless Christ? Peter being pieced together after being devoured by four monsters?"

Arla's grin was taunting. "Is that any sillier than water changing into wine, or Christ walking on the waves, or a man living in the belly of a fish?" Arla-k-Bau liked to jab at me. It had been a scandal when I selected a nonbeliever as my captain, but she was very good at her job, and I liked her around to keep me sharp. She had a good mind. Arla did, and I valued that more than blind obedience. Perhaps that was a sin in me.

"There is a difference," I said.

"Is there?" she snapped back. Her eyes saw through my masks. "Ah, Damien, admit it. You rather liked this book."

I cleared my throat. "It piqued my interest," I acknowledged. I had to justify myself. "You know the kind of matter I deal with ordinarily. Dreary little doctrinal deviations, obscure quibblings on theology somehow blown all out of proportion, bald-faced political maneuverings designed to set some ambitious planetary bishop up as a new pope, or to wring some concession or other from New Rome or Vess. The war is endless, but the battles are dull and dirty. They exhaust me, spiritually, emotionally, physically. Afterward I feel drained and guilty." I tapped the book's leather cover. "This is different. The heresy must be crushed, of course, but I admit that I am anxious to meet this Lukyan Judasson."

"The artwork is lovely as well," Arla said, flipping through the pages of *The Way of*

Cross and Dragon and stopping to study one especially striking plate. Judas weeping over his dragons. I think, I smiled to see that it had affected her as much as me. Then I frowned.

That was the first inkling I had of the difficulties ahead.

So it was that the *Truth of Christ* came to the porcelain city Ammadon on the world of Arion, where the Order of St. Judas Iscariot kept its House.

Arion was a pleasant, gentle world, inhabited for these past three centuries. Its population was under nine million; Ammadon, the only real city, was home to two of those millions. The technological level was medium high, but chiefly imported. Arion had little industry and was not an innovative world, except perhaps artistically. The arts were quite important here, flourishing and vital. Religious freedom was a basic tenet of the society, but Arion was not a religious world either, and the majority of the

He looked briefly angry at the rebuke but quickly swallowed his temper. Even a bishop can fear a Knight Inquisitor. "We are concerned, of course. . . . We . . . combat the heresy." "

populace lived devoutly secular lives. The most popular religion was Aestheticism, which hardly counts as a religion at all. There were also Taoists, Erikaners, Old True Christs, and Children of the Dreamer, along with a dozen lesser sects.

And finally there were nine churches of the One True Interstellar Catholic faith. There had been twelve.

The three others were now houses of Arion's fastest-growing faith, the Order of St. Judas Iscariot, which also had a dozen newly built churches of its own.

The bishop of Arion was a dark, severe man with close-cropped black hair who was not at all happy to see me. "Damien Har Veris!" he exclaimed in some wonder when I called on him at his residence. "We have heard of you, of course, but I never thought to meet or host you. Our numbers are small here—"

"And growing smaller," I said. "A matter of some concern to my Lord Commander, Archbishop Torgathon. Apparently you are less troubled, Excellency, since you did not see fit to report the activities of this sect of Judas worshippers."

He looked briefly angry at the rebuke,

but quickly he swallowed his temper. Even a bishop can fear a Knight Inquisitor. "We are concerned, of course," he said. "We do all we can to combat the heresy. If you have advice that will help us, I will be more than glad to listen."

"I am an Inquisitor of the Order Militant of the Knights of Jesus Christ," I said bluntly. "I do not give advice, Excellency. I take action. To that end I was sent to Arion, and that is what I shall do. Now tell me what you know about this heresy and this First Scholar, this Lukyan Judasson."

"Of course, Father Damien," the bishop began. He signaled for a servant to bring us a tray of wine and cheese, and began to summarize the short, but explosive, history of the Judas cult. I listened, polishing my nails on the crimson lapel of my jacket, until the black paint gleamed brilliantly, interrupting from time to time with a question. Before he had half-finished, I was determined to visit Lukyan personally. It seemed the best course of action.

And I had wanted to do it all along.

Appearances were important on Arion. I gathered, and I deemed it necessary to impress Lukyan with my self and my station. I wore my best boots, sleek dark handmade boots of Roman leather that had never seen the inside of Torgathon's receiving chamber, and a severe black suit with deep burgundy lapels and stiff collar. From around my neck hung a splendid crucifix of pure gold; my collar pin was a matching golden sword, the sigil of the Knights Inquisitor. Brother Denis painted my nails carefully, all black as ebony, and darkened my eyes as well, and used a fine white powder on my face. When I glanced in the mirror, I frightened even myself. I smiled, but only briefly. It ruined the effect.

I walked to the House of St. Judas Iscariot. The streets of Ammadon were wide and spacious and golden, lined by scarlet trees called whisperwinds, whose long, drooping tendrils did indeed seem to whisper secrets to the gentle breeze. Sister Judith came with me. She is a small woman, slight of build even in the cowed coveralls of the Order of St. Christopher. Her face is meek and kind, her eyes wide and youthful and innocent. I find her useful. Four times now she has killed those who attempted to assault me.

The House itself was newly built. Rambling and stately, it rose from amid gardens of small bright flowers and seas of golden grass, and the gardens were surrounded by a high wall. Murals covered both the outer wall around the property and the exterior of the building itself. I recognized a few of them from *The Way of Cross and Dragon* and stopped briefly to admire them before walking on through the main gate. No one tried to stop us. There were no guards, not even a receptionist. Within the walls, men and women strolled languidly through the flowers, or sat on benches beneath silverwoods and whisperwinds.

Sister Judith and I paused, then made

our way directly to the House itself.

We had just started up the steps when a man appeared from within; he stood waiting in the doorway. He was blond and fat, with a great wiry beard that framed a slow smile, and he wore a flimsy robe that fell to his sandaled feet, and on the robe were dragons bearing the silhouette of a man holding a cross.

When I reached the top of the steps, the man bowed to me. "Father Damien Har Veris of the Knights Inquisitor," he said. His smile widened. "I greet you in the name of Jesus, and St. Judas. I am Lukyan."

I made a note to myself to find out which of the bishop's staff was feeding information to the Judas cult, but my composure did not break. I have been a Knight Inquisitor for a long, long time. "Father Lukyan Mo," I said, taking his hand, "I have questions to ask of you." I did not smile.

He did. "I thought you might," he said.

Lukyan's office was large but spartan. Heretics often have a simplicity that the officers of the true Church seem to have lost. He did have one indulgence, however.

Dominating the wall behind his desk/console was the painting I had already fallen in love with, the blinded Judas weeping over his dragons.

Lukyan sat down heavily and motioned me to a second chair. We had left Sister Judith outside, in the waiting chamber. I prefer to stand, Father Lukyan," I said, knowing it gave me an advantage.

"Just Lukyan," he said. "Or Luke, if you prefer. We have little use for titles here."

"You are Father Lukyan Mo, born here on Arion, educated in the seminary on Cathaday, a former priest of the One True Interstellar Catholic Church of Earth and the Thousand Worlds," I said. "I will address you as befits your station, Father. I expect you to reciprocate. Is that understood?"

"Oh, yes," he said amiably.

"I am empowered to strip you of your right to administer the sacraments, to order you shunned and excommunicated for this heresy you have formulated. On certain worlds I could even order your death."

"But not on Arion," Lukyan said quickly. "We're very tolerant here. Besides, we outnumber you." He smiled. "As for the rest, well, I don't perform those sacraments much any more; you know. Not for years. I'm First Scholar now. A teacher, a thinker. I show others the way, help them find the faith. Excommunicate me if it will make you happy, Father Damien. Happiness is what all of us seek."

"You have given up the faith then, Father Lukyan?" I said, I deposited my copy of *The Way of Cross and Dragon* on his desk. "But I see you have found a new one." Now I did smile, but it was all ice, all menace, all mockery. "A more ridiculous creed I have yet to encounter. I suppose you will tell me that you have spoken to God, that He trusted you with this new revelation, so that you might clear the good name, such that it is, of Holy Judas?"

Now Lukyan's smile was very broad indeed. He picked up the book and beamed at me.

"Oh, no," he said. "No, I made it all up."

That stopped me. "What?"

"I made it all up," he repeated. He hefted the book fondly. "I drew on many sources, of course, especially the Bible, but I do think of *Cross and Dragon* mostly as my own work. It's rather good, don't you agree? Of course, I could hardly put my name on it, proud as I am of it, but I did include my imprimatur. Did you notice that? It was the closest I dared come to a by-line."

I was speechless only for a moment. Then I grimaced. "You startle me," I admitted. "I expected to find an inventive madman, some poor self-deluded fool firm in his belief that he had spoken to God. I've dealt with such fanatics before. Instead I find a cheerful cynic who has invented a religion for his own profit. I think I prefer the fanatics. You are beneath contempt, Father Lukyan. You will burn in hell for eternity."

"I doubt it," Lukyan said. "but you do mistake me, Father Damien. I am no cynic, nor do I profit from my dear St. Judas. Truthfully, I lived more comfortably as a priest of your own Church. I do this because it is my vocation."

I sat down. "You confuse me," I said. "Explain."

"Now I am going to tell you the truth," he

said. He said it in an odd way, almost as a cant. "I am a liar," he added.

"You want to confuse me with child's paradoxes," I snapped.

"No, no," he smiled. "A Liar. With a capital. It is an organization. Father Damien. A religion, you might call it. A great and powerful faith. And I am the smallest part of it."

"I know of no such church," I said.

"Oh, no, you wouldn't. It's secret. It has to be. You can understand that, can't you? People don't like being lied to."

"I do not like being lied to," I said.

Lukyan looked wounded. "I told you this would be the truth, didn't I? When a Liar says that, you can believe him. How else could we trust each other?"

"There are many of you," I said. I was starting to think that Lukyan was a madman after all, as fanatic as any heretic, but in a more complex way. Here was a heresy within a heresy, but I recognized my duty—to find the truth of things and set them right.

"Many of us," Lukyan said, smiling. "You would be surprised. Father Damien, really you would. But there are some things I dare not tell you."

"Tell me what you dare, then."

"Happily," said Lukyan Judasson. "We Liars, like all other religions, have several truths we take on faith. Faith is always required. There are some things that cannot



"Forgive me, Mrs. Willoughby, for continuing to address you as Mrs. Bellows. As you know psychiatry is an inexact science."

be proved. We believe that life is worth living. That is an article of faith. The purpose of life is to live, to resist death, perhaps to defy entropy."

"Go on," I said, growing even more interested despite myself.

"We also believe that happiness is a good, something to be sought after."

"The Church does not oppose happiness," I said dryly.

"I wonder," Lukyan said. "But let us not quibble. Whatever the Church's position on happiness, it does preach belief in an afterlife, in a supreme being, and a complex moral code."

"True."

"The Liars believe in no afterlife, no God. We see the universe as it is, Father Damien, and these naked truths are cruel ones. We who believe in life, and treasure it, will die. Afterward there will be nothing, eternal emptiness, blackness, nonexistence. In our living there has been no purpose, no poetry, no meaning. Nor do our deaths possess these qualities. When we are gone, the universe will not long remember us, and shortly it will be as if we had never lived at all. Our worlds and our universe will not long outlive us. Ultimately entropy will consume all, and our puny efforts cannot stay that awful end. It will be gone. It has never been. It has never mattered. The universe itself is doomed, transitory, and certainly it is uncaring."

I slid back in my chair, and a shiver went through me as I listened to poor Lukyan's dark words. I found myself fingering my crucifix. "A bleak philosophy," I said, "as well as a false one. I have had that fearful vision myself. I think all of us do, at some point. But it is not so, Father. My faith sustains me against such nihilism. Faith is a shield against despair."

"Oh, I know that, my friend, my Knight Inquisitor," Lukyan said. "I'm glad to see you understand so well. You are almost one of us already."

I frowned.

"You've touched the heart of it," Lukyan continued. "The truths, the great truths—and most of the lesser ones as well—they are unbearable for most men. We find our shield in faith. Your faith, my faith, any faith. It doesn't matter, so long as we believe, really and truly believe, in whatever lie we cling to." He fingered the ragged edges of his great blond beard. "Our psychs have always told us that believers are the happy ones, you know. They may believe in Christ or Buddha or Erika Stormjones, in reincarnation or immortality or nature, in the power of love or the platform of a political faction, but it all comes to the same thing. They believe. They are happy. It is the ones who have seen truth who despair, and kill themselves. The truths are so vast, the faiths so little, so poorly made, so riddled with errors and contradictions. We see around them and through them, and then we feel the weight of darkness on us, and we can no longer be happy."

I am not a slow man. I knew, by then,

where Lukyan Judasson was going. "Your Liars invent faiths."

He smiled. "Of all sorts. Not only religious. Think of it. We know truth for the cruel instrument it is. Beauty is infinitely preferable to truth. We invent beauty. Faiths, political movements, high ideals, belief in love and fellowship. All of them are lies. We tell those lies, and others, endless others. We improve on history and myth and religion, make each more beautiful, better, easier to believe in. Our lies are not perfect, of course. The truths are too big. But perhaps someday we will find one great lie that all humanity can use. Until then, a thousand small lies will do."

"I think I do not care for you Liars very much," I said with a cold, even fervor. "My whole life has been a quest for truth."

Lukyan was indulgent. "Father Damien Har Veris, Knight Inquisitor. I know you better than that. You are a Liar yourself. You do good work. You ship from world to world, and on each you destroy the foolish, the rebels, the questioners who would bring down the edifice of the vast lie that you serve."

"If my lie is so admirable," I said, "then why have you abandoned it?"

"A religion must fit its culture and society, work with them, not against them. If there is conflict, contradiction, then the lie breaks down, and the faith falters. Your Church is good for many worlds, Father, but not for Arion. Life is too kind here, and your faith is stern. Here we love beauty, and your faith offers too little. So we have improved it. We studied this world for a long time. We know its psychological profile. St. Judas will thrive here. He offers drama, and color, and much beauty—the aesthetics are admirable. His is a tragedy with a happy ending, and Arion dotes on such stories. And the dragons are a nice touch. I think your own Church ought to find a way to work in dragons. They are marvelous creatures."

"Mythical," I said.

"Hardly," he replied. "Look it up." He grinned at me. "You see, really, it all comes back to faith. Can you really know what happened three thousand years ago? You have one Judas. I have another. Both of us have books. Is yours true? Can you really believe that? I have been admitted only to the first circle of the order of Liars. So I do not know all our secrets, but I know that we are very old. It would not surprise me to learn that the gospels were written by men very much like me. Perhaps there never was a Judas at all. Or a Jesus."

"I have faith that that is not so," I said.

"There are a hundred people in this building who have a deep and very real faith in St. Judas and the Way of Cross and Dragon," Lukyan said. "Faith is a very good thing. Do you know that the suicide rate on Arion has decreased by almost a third since the Order of St. Judas was founded?"

I remember rising slowly from my chair. "You are as fanatical as any heretic I have ever met, Lukyan Judasson." I told him, "I pity you the loss of your faith."

Lukyan rose with me. "Pity yourself, Damien Har Veris," he said. "I have found a new faith and a new cause, and I am a happy man. You, my dear friend, are tortured and miserable."

"That is a lie!" I am afraid I screamed.

"Come with me," Lukyan said. He touched a panel on his wall, and the great painting of Judas weeping over his dragons slid up out of sight, and there was a stairway leading down into the ground. "Follow me," he said.

In the cellar was a great glass vat full of pale green fluid, and in it a thing was floating—a thing very like an ancient embryo, aged and infantile at the same time, naked, with a huge head and a tiny atrophied body. Tubes ran from its arms and legs and genitals, connecting it to the machinery that kept it alive.

When Lukyan turned on the lights, it opened its eyes. They were large and dark, and they looked into my soul.

"This is my colleague," Lukyan said, patting the side of the vat. "Jon Azure Cross, a Liar of the fourth circle."

"And a telepath," I said with a sick certainty. I had led pogroms against other telepaths, children mostly, on other worlds. The Church teaches that the psionic powers are a trap of Satan's. They are not mentioned in the Bible. I have never felt good about those killings.

"Jon read you the moment you entered the compound," Lukyan said, "and notified me. Only a few of us know that he is here. He helps us lie most efficiently. He knows when faith is true and when it is feigned. I have an implant in my skull. Jon can talk to me at all times. It was he who initially recruited me into the Liars. He knew my faith was hollow. He felt the depth of my despair."

Then the thing in the tank spoke, its metallic voice coming from a speaker-grill in the base of the machine that nurtured it. "And I feel yours, Damien Har Veris, empty priest. Inquisitor, you have asked too many questions. You are sick at heart, and tired, and you do not believe. Join us, Damien. You have been a Liar for a long, long time!"

For a moment I hesitated, looking deep into myself, wondering what it was I did believe. I searched for my faith, the fire that had once sustained me, the certainty in the teachings of the Church, the presence of Christ within me. I found none of it, none. I was empty inside, burned out, full of questions and pain. But as I was about to answer Jon Azure Cross and the smiling Lukyan Judasson, I found something else, something I *did* believe in, something I had always believed in.

Truth.

I believed in truth, even when it hurt. "He is lost to us," said the telepath with the mocking name of Cross.

Lukyan's smile faded. "Oh, really? I had hoped you would be one of us, Damien. You seemed ready."

I was suddenly afraid, and I considered sprinting up the stairs to Sister Judith. Lukyan had told me so very much, and now I

had rejected them.

The telepath felt my fear. "You cannot hurt us, Damien," it said. "Go in peace. Lukyan told you nothing."

Lukyan was frowning. "I told him a good deal, Jon," he said.

"Yes. But can he trust the words of such a Liar as you?" The small misshapen mouth of the thing in the vat twitched in a smile, and its great eyes closed, and Lukyan Judasson sighed and led me up the stairs.

It was not until some years later that I realized it was Jon Azure Cross who was lying, and the victim of his lie was Lukyan. I could hurt them. I did.

It was almost simple. The bishop had friends in government and the media. With some money in the right places. I made some friends of my own. Then I exposed Cross in his cellar, charging that he had used his psionic powers to tamper with the minds of Lukyan's followers. My friends were receptive to the charges. The guardians conducted a raid, took the telepath Cross into custody, and later tried him.

He was innocent, of course. My charge was nonsense; human telepaths can read minds in close proximity, but seldom anything more. But they are rare, and much feared, and Cross was hideous enough so that it was easy to make him a victim of superstition. In the end, he was acquitted, and he left the city of Ammadon and perhaps Arion itself, bound for regions unknown.

But it had never been my intention to convict him. The charge was enough. The cracks began to show in the lie that he and Lukyan had built together. Faith is hard to come by, and easy to lose, and the merest doubt can begin to erode even the strongest foundation of belief.

The bishop and I labored together to sow further doubts. It was not as easy as I might have thought. The Liars had done their work well. Ammadon, like most civilized cities, had a great pool of knowledge, a computer system that linked the schools and universities and libraries together, and made their combined wisdom available to any who needed it.

But, when I checked, I soon discovered that the histories of Rome and Babylon had been subtly reshaped, and there were three listings for Judas Iscariot—one for the betrayer, one for the saint, and one for the conqueror-king of Babylon. His name was also mentioned in connection with the Hanging Gardens, and there is an entry for a so-called Codex Judas.

And according to the Ammadon library, dragons became extinct on Old Earth around the time of Christ.

We purged all those lies finally, wiped them from the memories of the computers, though we had to cite authorities on a half-dozen non-Christian worlds before the librarians and academics would credit that the differences were anything more than a question of religious preference.

By then the Order of St. Judas had withered in the glare of exposure. Lukyan Judasson had grown gaunt and angry, and at least half of his churches had closed.

The heresy never died completely, of course. There are always those who believe, no matter what. And so to this day *The Way of Cross and Dragon* is read on Arion, in the porcelain city Ammadon, amid murmuring whisperwinds.

Arla-k-Bau and the *Truth of Christ* carried me back to Vess a year after my departure, and Archbishop Torgathon finally gave me the leave of absence I had asked for, before sending me out to fight still other heresies. So I had my victory, and the Church continued on much as before, and the Order of St. Judas Iscariot was thoroughly crushed. The telepath Jon Azure Cross had been wrong, I thought then. He had sadly underestimated the power of a Knight Inquisitor.

Later, though, I remembered his words.

You cannot hurt us, Damien.

Us?

The Order of St. Judas? Or the Liars?

He lied, I think, deliberately, knowing I would go forth and destroy the Way of Cross and Dragon, knowing, too, that I could not touch the Liars, would not even dare mention them. How could I? Who would credit it? A grand star-spanning conspiracy as old as history? It reeks of paranoia, and I had no proof at all.

The telepath lied for Lukyan's benefit so

he would let me go. I am certain of that now. Cross risked much to ensnare me. Failing, he was willing to sacrifice Lukyan Judasson and his lie, pawns in some greater game.

So I left, and I carried within me the knowledge that I was empty of faith, but for a blind faith in truth—truth I could no longer find in my Church.

I grew certain of that in my year of rest, which I spent reading and studying on Vess and Cathaday and Celia's World. Finally I returned to the archbishop's receiving room, and stood again before Torgathon Nine-Klariis Tûn in my very worst pair of boots. "My Lord Commander," I said to him, "I can accept no further assignments. I ask that I be retired from active service."

"For what cause?" Torgathon rumbled, splashing feebly.

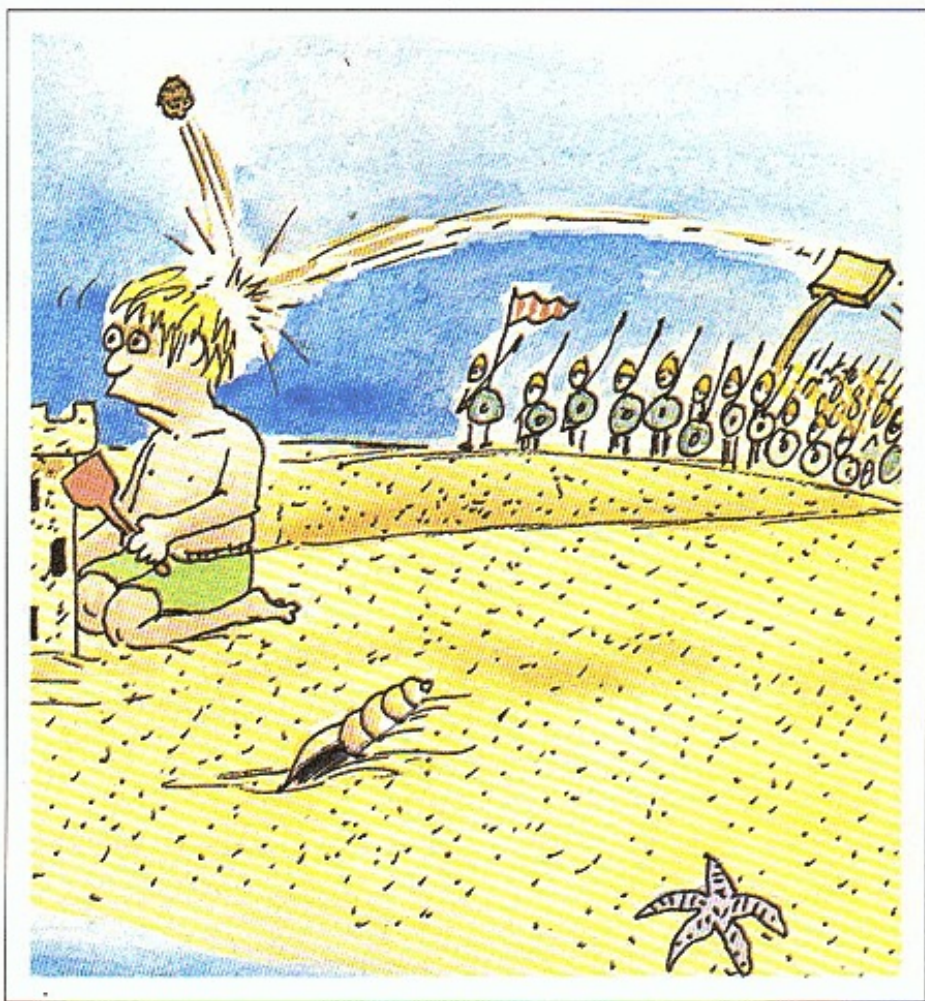
"I have lost the faith," I said to him, simply.

He regarded me for a long time, his pupilless eyes blinking. At last he said, "Your faith is a matter between you and your confessor. I care only about your results. You have done good work, Damien. You may not retire, and we will not allow you to resign."

The truth will set us free.

But freedom is cold, and empty, and frightening, and lies can often be warm and beautiful.

Last year the Church granted me a new ship. I named this one *Dragon*. ∞





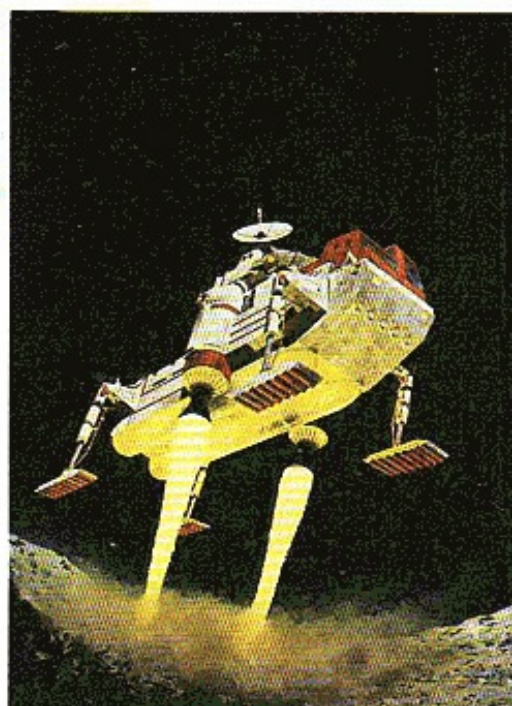


As the stately sailing ships of an earlier age of exploration crossed the oceans of earth, today ships of metal and flame are heading outward from our home world to explore the solar system. In this essay, written more than 20 years ago, the prophetic Arthur C. Clarke shows how every great achievement of the human race began as an idea, a dream, a vision, in the minds of individual human beings.

A historian of the twenty-first century, looking back past our own age to the beginnings of human civilization, will be conscious of four great turning points that mark the end of one era and the dawn of a new and totally different mode of life. Two of these events are lost, probably forever, in the primeval night before history began. The invention of agriculture led to the founding of settled communities and gave men the leisure and social intercourse without which progress is impossible. The taming of fire made him virtually independent of climate and, most important of all, led to the working of metals and so set him upon the road of technological

From *THE CHALLENGE OF THE SPACESHIP*, by Arthur C. Clarke. Reprinted by permission of the author and the author's agents, Scott Meredith Literary Agency, Inc., 845 Third Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10022.

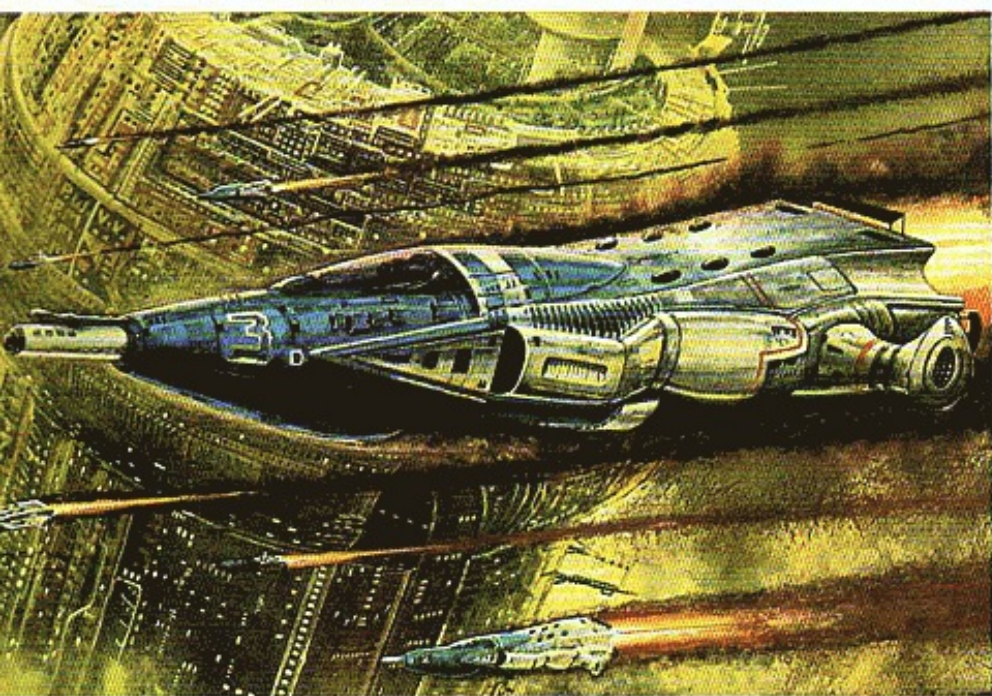
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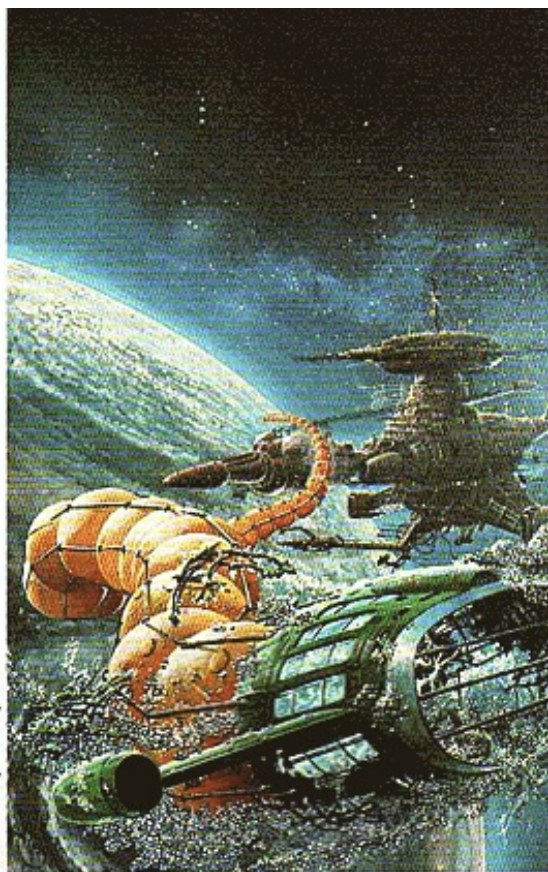
SPACESHIPS

BY ARTHUR C. CLARKE

Cosmic toys to propel mankind from its cloistered nursery out into the playground of the stars



Illustrations by Bob Layzell



● *The dynamism of astronautics is in tune with the expansive spirit of our age.* ●

development—the road that was to lead, centuries later, to the steam engine, the Industrial Revolution, and the age of steel and gasoline and surface transportation through which we are now passing.

The third revolution began, as all the world knows, in a squash court in Chicago on December 2, 1942, with the first man-made self-sustaining nuclear reaction. We are still too close to that cataclysmic event to see it in its true perspective, but we know that it will change our world, for better or for worse, almost beyond recognition. And we know too that it is linked with the fourth and in some ways greatest change of all—the crossing of space and the exploration of other planets. For though the first space vehicles were chemically fueled, only atomic energy is adequate to lift really large payloads out of the earth's gravitational field—that invisible maelstrom whose tug can still be felt a million kilometers away.

There are still some scientists who consider that there is no point in sending men into space, even when it becomes technically possible;





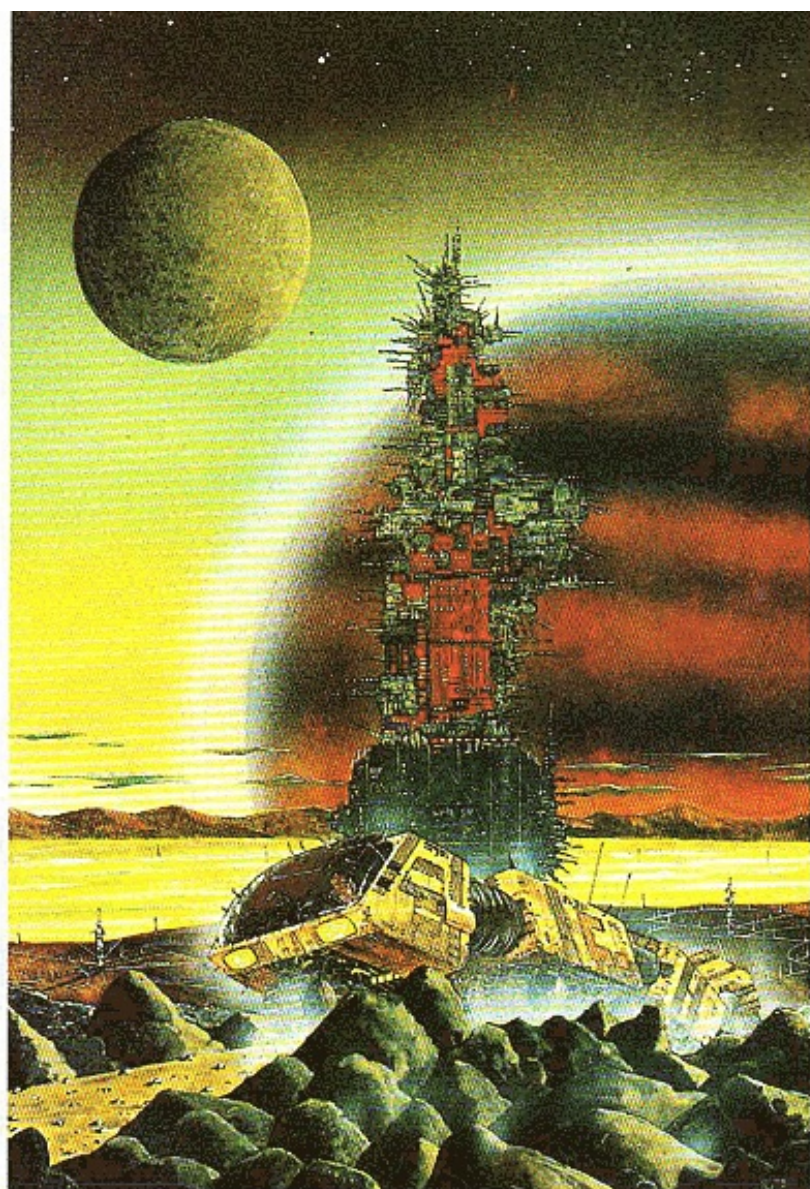
machines, they argue, can do all that is necessary. Such an outlook is incredibly shortsighted; worse than that it is stupid, for it completely ignores human nature. Though the specific ideals of astronautics are new, the motives and impulses underlying them are as old as the race—and, in the ultimate analysis, they owe as much to emotion as to reason. Even if we could learn nothing in space that our instruments would not already tell us, we should go there just the same.

Some men compose music or spend their lives trying to catch and hold forever the last colors of the dying day or a pattern of clouds that through all eternity will never come again. Others make voyages of exploration across the world, while some make equally momentous journeys in quiet studies with no more equipment than pencil and paper. If you asked these men the purpose of their music, their painting, their exploring, or their mathematics, they would probably say that they hoped to increase the beauty or knowledge in the world. That answer would be true and yet misleading. Very few indeed would give the

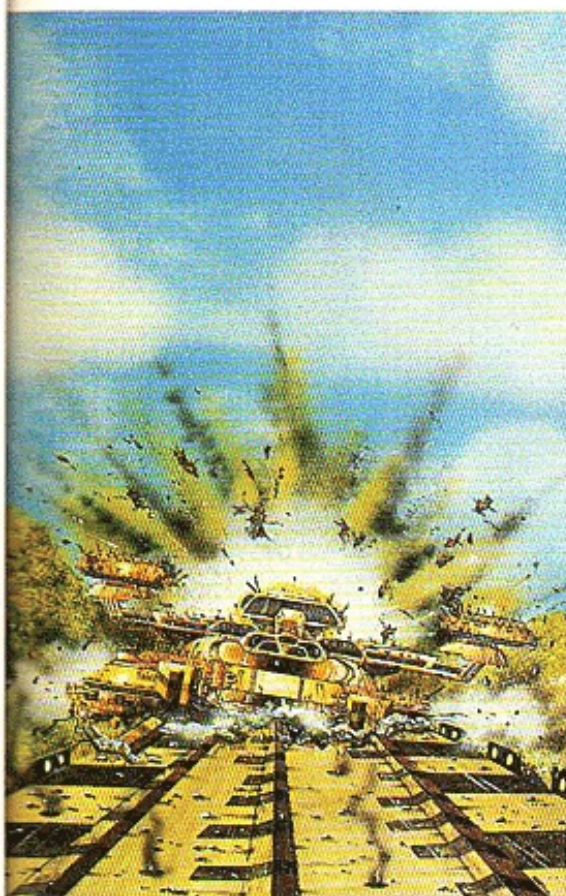
◐ *Humankind can scarcely undertake the challenge of space while still earthbound.* ◑



Tony Roberts

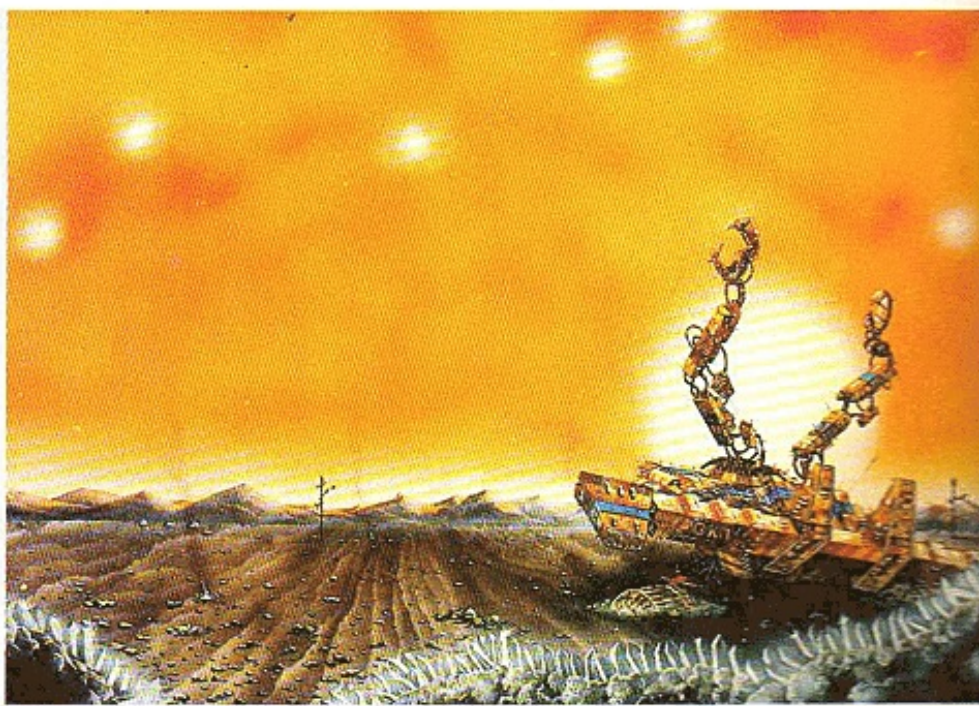


Peter Kniffon



Peter Kniffon

Peter Kniffon



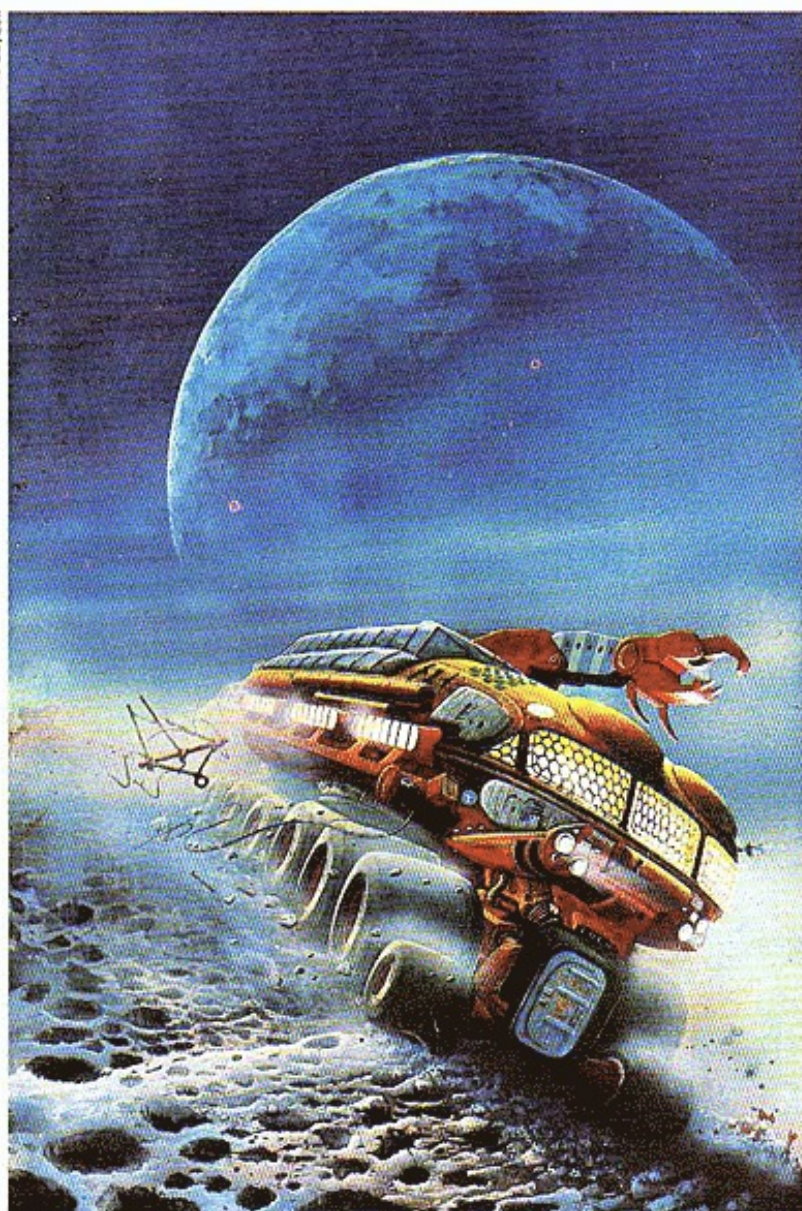


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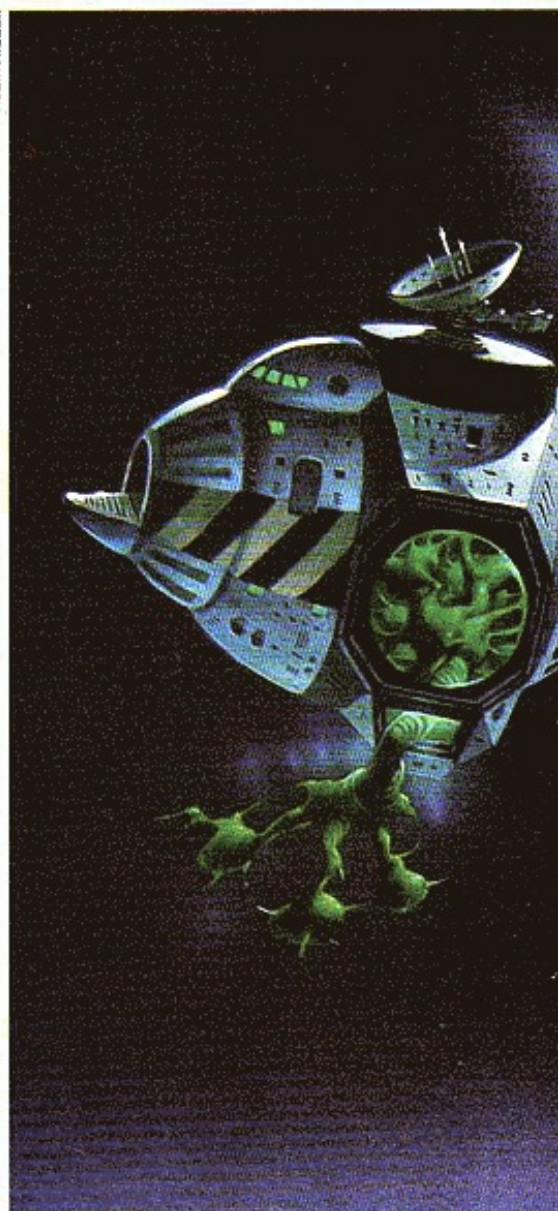


Bob Layzell

Bob Layzell



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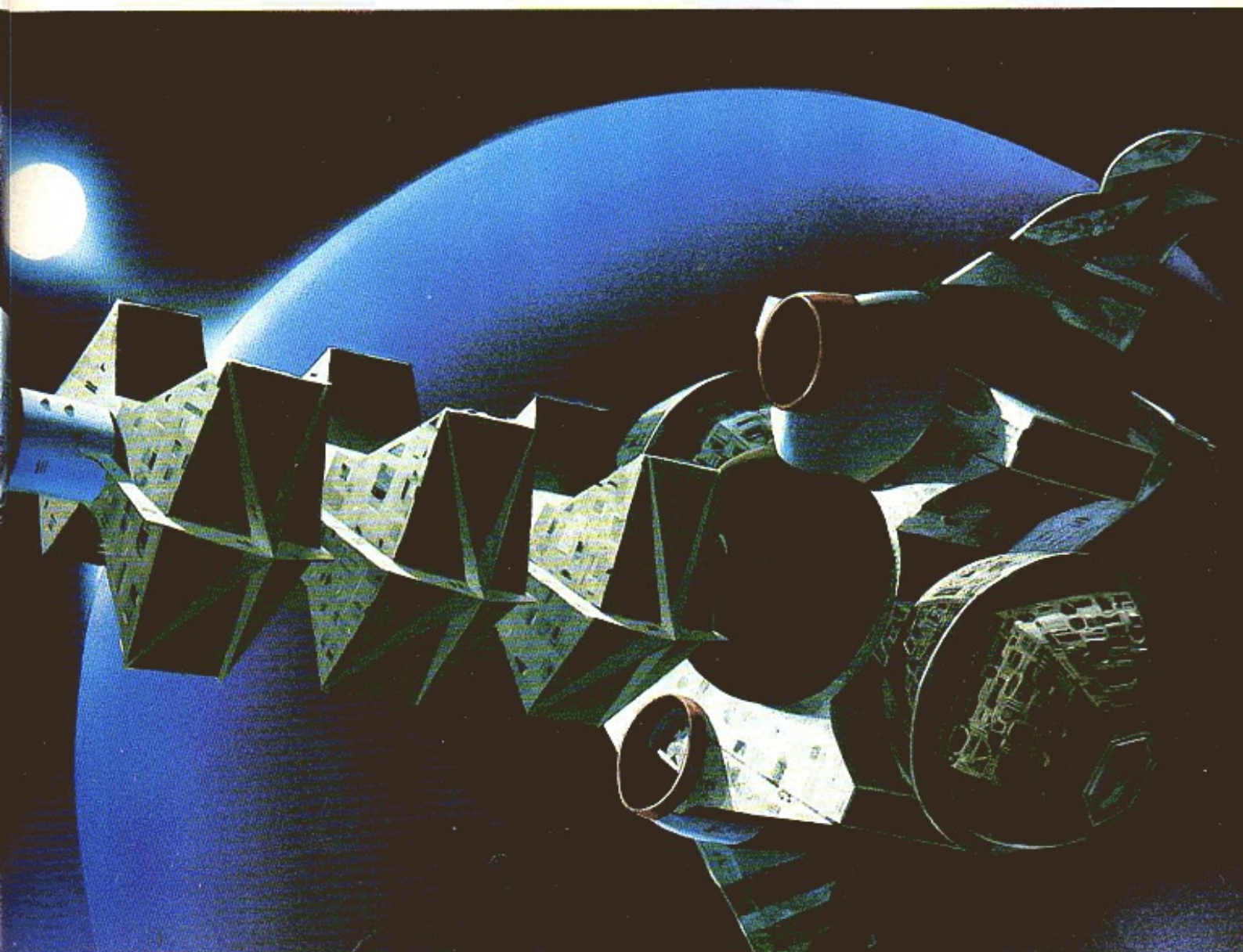


6 *The crossing of space may turn our minds away from present tribal squabbles.* 9

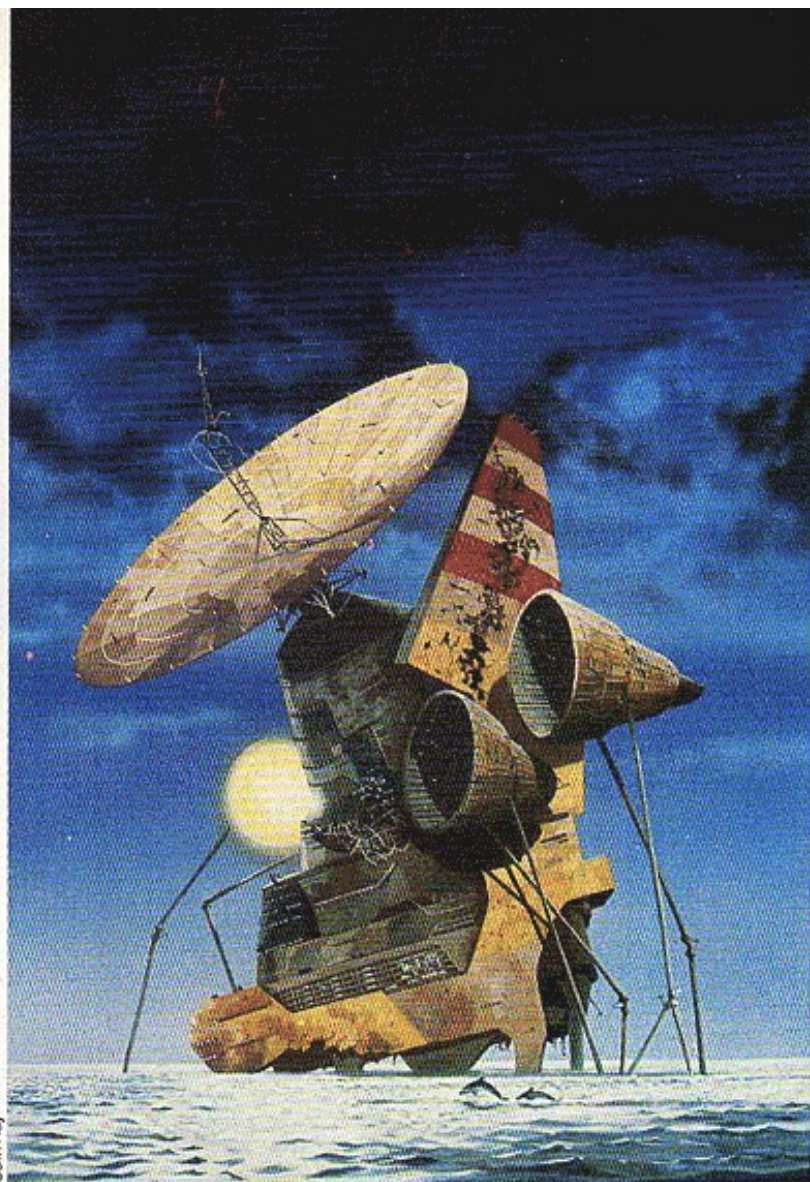
simpler, more fundamental, reason that they had no choice in the matter—that what they did, they did simply because they had to do it.

The urge to explore, to discover, to “follow knowledge like a sinking star,” is a primary human impulse, which needs and can receive no further justification than its own existence. The search for knowledge, said a modern Chinese philosopher, is a form of play. If this is true, then the spaceship, when it comes, will be the ultimate toy that may lead mankind from its cloistered nursery out into the playground of the stars.

The crossing of space—even the sense of its imminent achievement in the years before it comes—may do much to turn men’s minds outward and away from their present tribal squabbles. In this sense the rocket, far from being one of the destroyers of civilization, may provide the safety valve that is needed to preserve it. By providing an outlet for man’s exuberant and adolescent energies, astronautics may make a truly vital contribution to the problems of the present world. In many ways, astronautics is in tune with the expansive spirit of our age.



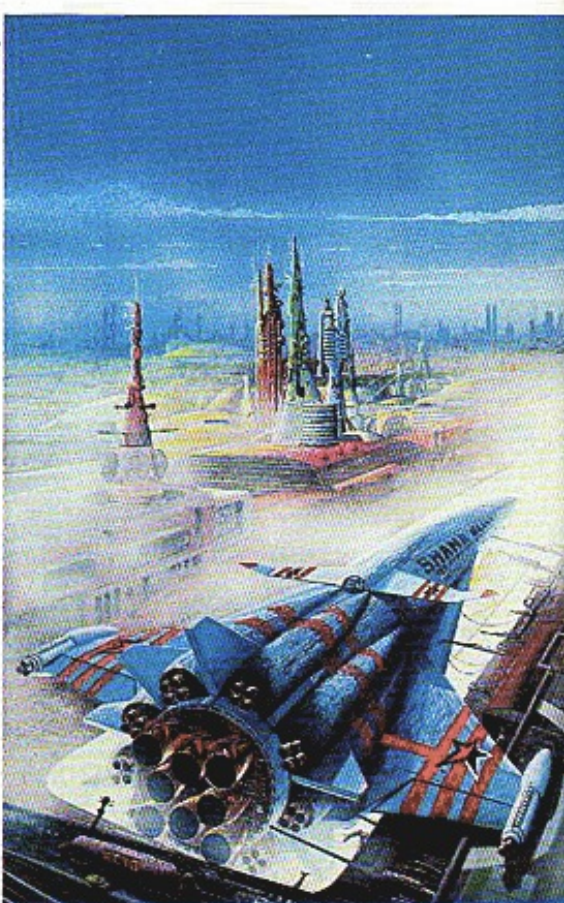
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Jim Burns

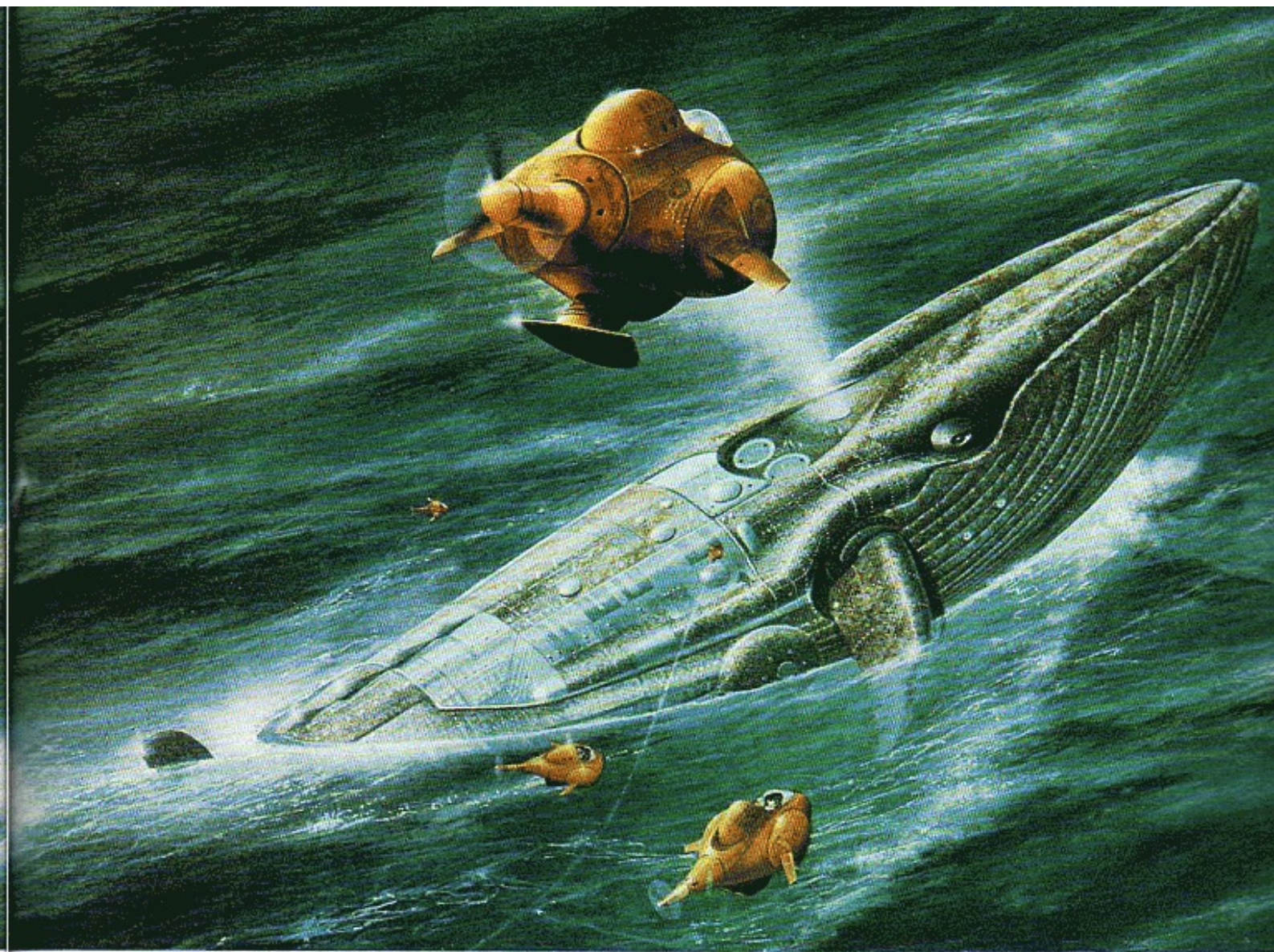


Bob Layzell



Alan Daniels





The future development of mankind, on the spiritual no less than the material plane, is bound up with the conquest of space.

The future of which I have spoken is now being shaped by men working in quiet offices, and by men taking instrument readings amid the savage roar of harnessed jets. Some are engineers, some are dreamers—but many are both. The time will come when they can say with T. E. Lawrence: "All men dream; but not equally. Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds wake in the day to find that it was vanity; but the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they may act their dream with open eyes, to make it possible."

Thus it has always been in the past, for our civilization is no more than the sum of all the dreams that earlier ages have brought to fulfillment. And so it must always be, for if men cease to dream, if they turn their backs upon the universe, the story of our race will end. ∞

From *The Challenge of the Spaceship* by Arthur C. Clarke, Harper & Brothers (New York), 1959.

● The future development of mankind is bound up with the conquest of space. ●

THE LONGEST STORY EVER TOLD

Royce Millison requested cremation. He had got the idea in 1908, early in his long life. He was neat and efficient and said he didn't want his remains "to take up space."

In 1991 he restated his desire, being a person who tends to repeat himself and believing he was near the end of the line. But then the Wackman Breakthrough increased his life span by thirty percent, and he lived to be one hundred twenty-two. At a still-vigorous one hundred twenty-one, he stated yet again his desire to be cremated. He had had a dream that he would be cremated three times, that his ashes would be scattered the second time and regathered the third. When he spoke about this, friends thought he had become senile. But he hadn't; his dream was a prophecy.

One year later the front wheel of his motorcycle dug into soft sand and he did an endo from which he never recovered. He was cremated at 1,115 degrees Fahrenheit. His ashes were deposited in an appropriate urn.

Five billion years later the sun had swollen to a radius of one astronomical unit, swallowing Mercury, Venus, and Earth and vaporizing Mars.

BY HUGH DOWNS





*If the black
hole ejects TV
sets, the
thrice-cremated
will rise —
a disturbing
glimpse into
a universe of
strange and skewed
possibilities*

Along with everything else in the world, Millison's ashes were cremated at 4,800 degrees Kelvin. This time they were scattered through the solar interior, gradually rising in temperature to one hundred million degrees Kelvin.

Sixty-two billion years after this, a universe, as neat and as efficient as Royce Millison was, regathered his ashes in the Great Implosion and compacted them to negligible size. Then, at a temperature above one trillion degrees, it cremated them a third time.

He was not prepared for what happened afterward (if *afterward* is the right word for a time as distorted as that in the transition from one universe to another). Conditions inside the cosmic egg, in bending some fundamental physical laws out of shape, did the same crazy thing to entropy that allows a black hole to eject a television set. And here he was again (if *here* is the correct word for a place occupied by a new universe).

Although his memory of a previous life was hazy and at times haunting, Royce Millison was not surprised to find himself back in business, and not much changed—except for having a neurotic aversion to motorcycles. ☐

PAINTING
BY ERIC PAETZ

The space habitat was the perfect planned colony. But people kept disappearing—until the disaster struck.

DOWN & OUT ON ELLFIVE PRIME

BY DEAN ING

Responding to Almquist's control, the little utility tug waited from the North dock port and made its gentle pirouette. Ellfive Prime Colony seemed to fall away. Two hundred thousand kilometers distant, blue-white Earth swam into view: cradle of mankind, cage for too many. Almquist turned his long body in its cushions and managed an obligatory smile over frown lines. "If that won't make you homesick, Mr. Weston, nothing will."

The fat man grunted, looking not at the planet he had deserted but at something much nearer. From the widening of Weston's eyes, you could tell it was something big, closing fast. Torin Almquist knew what it was; he eased the tug out, watching his radar, to give Weston the full benefit of it.

When the tip of the great solar mirror swept past, Weston blanched and cried out. For an instant, the view port

was filled with cables and the mirror pivot mechanism. Then once again there was nothing but Earth and sharp pinpricks of starlight. Weston turned toward the engineering manager, wattles at his jawline trembling. "Stupid bastard," he grated. "If that'll be your standard joke on new arrivals, you must cause a lot of coronaries."

Abashed, disappointed: "A mirror comes by every fourteen seconds, Mr. Weston. I thought you'd enjoy it. You asked to see the casting facility, and this is where you can see it best. Besides, if you were retired as a heart case, I'd know it." And the hell with you, he added silently. Almquist retreated into an impersonal spiel he knew by heart, moving the tug back to gain a panorama of the colony with its yellow legend, L-5, proud and unnecessary on the hull. He moved the controls gently, the blond hairs on his

forearm masking the play of tendons within.

The colony hung below them, a vast shining melon the length of the new Hudson River Bridge and nearly a kilometer thick. Another of its three mirror strips, anchored near the opposite South end cap of Ellfive Prime and spread like curved petals toward the sun, hurtled silently past the view port. Almquist kept talking. "... Prime was the second industrial colony in space, dedicated in 2007. These days it's a natural choice for a retirement community. A fixed population of twenty-five hundred—plus a few down-and-out bums hiding here and there. Nowhere near as big a place as Orbital General's new industrial colony out near the asteroid belt."

Almquist droned on, backing the tug farther away. Beyond the South end cap, a tiny mote sparkled in the void, and Weston squinted, watching it.

"The first Ellfive was a General Dynamics-Lever Brothers project in close orbit, but it got snuffed by the Chinese in 2012, during the war."

"I was only a cub then," Weston said, relaxing a bit. "This colony took some damage too, didn't it?"

Almquist glanced at Weston, who looked older despite his bland flesh. Well, living Earthside with seven billion people tended to age you. "The month I was born," Almquist nodded, "a nuke was intercepted just off the centerline of Ellfive Prime. Thermal shock knocked a tremendous dimple in the hull; from inside, of course, it looked like a dome poking up through the soil south of center."

Weston clapped pudgy hands, a gesture tagging him as neo-Afrikaner. "That'll be the hill, then. The one with the pines and spruce, near Hilton Prime?"

A nod. "Stress analysts

PAINTING BY VINCENT DI FATE



swore they could leave the dimple if they patched the hull around it. Cheapest solution—and for once, a pretty one. When they finished bringing new lunar topsoil and distributing it inside, they saw there was enough dirt on the slope for spruce and ponderosa pine roots. To balance thousands of tons of new processed soil, they built a blister out on the opposite side of the hull and moved some heavy hardware into it.

The fat man's gaze grew condescending as he saw the great metal blister roll into view like a tumor on the hull. "Looks slapdash," he said.

"Not really; they learned from DynLever's mistakes. The first Ellfive colony was a cylinder, heavier than an ellipsoid like ours." Almquist pointed through the view port. "DynLever designed for a low ambient pressure without much nitrogen in the cylinder and raised hell with water transpiration and absorption in a lot of trees they tried to grow around their living quarters. I'm no botanist, but I know Ellfive Prime has an Earthside ecology—the same air you'd breathe in Peru, only cleaner. We don't codrle our grass and trees, and we grow all our crops right in the North end cap below us."

Something new and infinitely pleasing shifted Weston's features. "You used to have an external crop module to feed fifty thousand people, back when this colony was big in manufacturing—"

"Sold it," Almquist put in. "Detached the big rig and towed it out to a belt colony when I was new here. We didn't really need it anymore—"

Weston returned the interruption pointedly: "You didn't let me finish. I put that deal over. OrbGen made a grand sum on it—which is why the wife and I can retire up here. One hand washes the other, eh?"

Almquist said something noncommittal. He had quit wondering why he disliked so many newcomers. He knew why. It was a sling-cast irony that he, Ellfive Prime's top technical man, did not have enough rank in OrbGen to be slated for colony retirement. Torin Almquist might last as Civil Projects Manager for another ten years, if he kept a spotless record. Then he would be Earth-sided in the crowds and smog and would eat fish cakes for the rest of his life. Unlike his ex-wife, who had left him to teach in a belt colony so that she would never have to return to Earth. And who could blame her? *Shit.*

"I beg your pardon?"

"Sorry; I was thinking. You wanted to see the high-g casting facility? It's that sphere strapped on to the mirror that's swinging toward us. It's moving over two hundred meters per second, a lot faster than the colony floor, being a kilometer and a half out from the spin axis. So at the mirror tip, instead of pulling around one standard g, they're pulling over three g's. Nobody spends more than an hour there. We balance the sphere with storage masses on the other mirror tips."

Restive, only half-interested: "Why? It doesn't look very heavy."

"It isn't," Almquist conceded, "but Ellfive Prime has to be balanced just so if she's going to spin on center. That's why they filled that blister with heavy stored equipment opposite the hull—though a few tons here and there don't matter."

Weston wasn't listening. "I keep seeing something like barn doors flipping around, past the other end, ah, end cap." He pointed. Another brief sparkle. "There," he said.

Almquist's arm tipped the control stick, and the tug slid farther from the colony's axis of rotation. "Stacking mirror cells for shipment," he explained. "We still have slag left over from a nitrogen-rich asteroid they towed here in the old days. Fused into plates, the slag makes good protection against solar flares. With a mirror face, it can do double duty. We're bundling up a pallet load, and a few cargo men are out there in P-suits—pressure suits. They—"

*•Streaking out of the ecliptic,
a brief nova
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Weston saw
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Weston would never know, and have cared less, what Almquist had started to say. The colony manager clapped the fingers of his free hand against the wireless speaker in his left ear. His face stiffened with zealot intensity. Fingers flickering to the console as the tug rolled and accelerated, Almquist began to speak into his throat mike—something about a Code Three. Weston knew something was being kept from him. He didn't like it and said so. Then he said so again.

"... happened before," Almquist was saying to someone, "but this time you keep him centered, Radar Prime. I'll haul him in myself. Just talk him out of a panic; you know the drill. Please be quiet, Mr. Weston," he added in a too-polite aside.

"Don't patronize me," Weston spat. "Are we in trouble?"

"I'm swinging around the hull; give me a vector," Almquist continued, and Weston felt his body sag under acceleration. "Are you in voice contact?" Pause. "Doesn't he acknowledge? He's on a work-crew-scrambler circuit, but you can patch me in. Do it."

"You're treating me like a child."

"If you don't shut up, Weston, I will. Oh, hell, it's easier to humor you." He flicked a toggle, and the cabin speaker responded. "... be okay. I have my explosive riveter," said an unfamiliar voice; adult male, thinned and tightened by tension. "Starting to retro-fire now."

Almquist counted aloud at the muffled sharp bursts. "Not too fast, Versky," he cautioned. "You overheat a rivet gun, and the whole load could detonate."

"Jeez, I'm cartwheeling," Versky cut in. "Hang tight, guys." More bursts, now a staccato hammer. Versky's monologue gave no sign that he had heard Almquist, had all the signs of impending panic.

"Versky, listen to me. Take your goddamn finger off the trigger. We have you on radar. Relax. This is Torin Almquist, Versky. I say again—"

But he didn't. Far beyond, streaking out of the ecliptic, a brief nova flashed against the stars. The voice was cut off instantly. Weston saw Almquist's eyes blink hard, and in that moment the manager's face seemed aged by compassion and hopelessness. Then, very quietly: "Radar Prime, what do you have on scope?"

"Nothing but confetti, Mr. Almquist. Going everywhere at once."

"Should I pursue?"

"Your option, sir."

"And your responsibility."

"Yes, sir. No, don't pursue. Sorry."

"Not your fault. I want reports from you and Versky's cargo-team leader with all possible speed." Almquist flicked toggles with delicate savagery, turned his little vessel around, arrowed back to the dock port. Glancing at Weston, he said, "A skilled cargo man named Yves Versky. Experienced man; should've known better. He floated into a mirror support while horsing those slag cells around and got grazed by it. Batted him hell to breakfast." Then, whispering viciously to himself, "God-damn those big rivet guns. They can't be used like control jets. Versky knew that."

Then, for the first time, Weston realized what he had seen. A man in a pressure suit had just been blown to small pieces before his eyes. It would make a lovely anecdote over sherry, Weston decided.

Even if Almquist had swung past the external hull blister he would have failed to see, through a darkened view port, the two shabby types looking out. Nobody had official business in the blister. The younger man grimaced nervously, heavy cords bunching at his neck. He was half a head taller than his companion. "What d'you think, Zen?"

The other man yielded a lopsided smile. "Sounds good." He unplugged a pocket communicator from the wall and stuffed it into his threadbare coverall, then leaned forward at the view port. His chunky, muscular torso and short legs ill-matched the extraordinary arms that reached halfway to his knees, giving him the look of a tall dwarf. "I think they bought it, Yves."

"What if they didn't?"

Zen swung around, now grinning outright, and regarded Yves Versky through a swatch of brown hair that was seldom cut. "Hey, do like boss Almquist told you: Relax! They gotta buy it."

"I don't follow you."

"Then you'd better learn to. Look, if they recover any pieces, they'll find human flesh. How can they know it was a poor rummy's body thawed after six months in deep freeze? And if they *did* decide it's a scam, they'd have to explain how we planted him in your P-suit. And cut him loose from the blister, when only a few people are supposed to have access here; and preset the audio tape and the explosive, and coaxed a decent performance out of a lunk like you, and," he spread his apelike arms wide, his face comically ugly in glee, "nobody can afford to admit there's a scam counterculture on Ellfive Prime. All the way up to Torin Almquist there'd be just too much egg on too many faces. It ain't gonna happen, Versky."

The hulking cargo man found himself infected by the grin, but: "I wonder how long it'll be before I see another egg."

Zen snorted, "First time you lug a carton of edible garbage out of Hilton Prime, me lad, Jean Neruda's half-blind; when you put on the right coverall, he won't know he has an extra in his recycling crew, and after two days you won't mind pickin' chicken out of the slop. Just sit tight in your basement hidey-hole when you're off duty for a while. Stay away from crews that might recognize you until your beard grows. And keep your head shaved like I told you."

Versky heaved a long sigh, sweeping a hand over his newly bald scalp. "You'll drop in on me? I need a lot of tips on the scam life. And—and I don't know how to repay you."

"A million ways. I'll think of a few, young fella. And sure, you'll see me—whenever I like."

Versky chuckled at the term *young fella*. He knew Zen might be in his forties, but he seemed younger. Versky followed his mentor to the air lock into the colony hull. "Well, just don't forget your friend in the garbage business," he urged, fearful of his unknown future.

Zen paused in the conduit that snaked beneath the soil of Ellfive Prime. "Friendship," he half-joked, "varies directly with mutual benefit and inversely with guilt. Put another way," he said, lapsing into scam language as he trotted toward the South end cap, "a friend who's willing to be understood is a joy. One that demands understanding is a pain in the ass."

"You think too much," Versky laughed. They moved softly now, approaching an entry to the hotel basement.

Zen glanced through the spy hole, paused before punching the wall in the requisite place. "Just like you work too much." He flashed his patented gargoyles grin. "Trust me. Give your heart a rest."

Versky, much too tall for his borrowed clothing, inflated his barrel chest in chal-

lenge. "Do I look like a heart murmur?"

A shrug. "You did to OrbGen's doctors, rot their souls—which is why you were due to be Earthsided next week. Don't lay that on me, ol' scam; I'm the one who's reprimanded you to a low-g colony, if you'll just stay in low-g areas near the end caps." He opened the door.

Versky saw the hand signal and whispered, "I got it: Wait thirty seconds." He chuckled again. "Sometimes I think you should be running this colony."

Zen slipped through, left the door nearly closed, waited until Versky had moved near the slit. "In some ways," he stage-whispered back, "I do." Wink. Then he scuttled away.

At mid-morning the next day, Almquist arranged the accident report and its supporting documents into a neat sequence across his video console. Slouching behind his desk with folded arms, he regarded the display for a moment before lifting his eyes. "What've I forgot, Emory?"

Emory Reina cocked his head sparrow-like at the display. Almquist gnawed a cuticle, watching the soulful Reina's eyes dart back and forth in sober scrutiny. "It's all there," was Reina's verdict. "The only safety infraction was Versky's, I think."

"You mean the tether he should've worn?"

A nod; Reina started to speak but thought better of it, the furrows dark on his olive face.

"Spit it out, dammit," Almquist goaded. Reina usually thought a lot more than he talked, a trait Almquist valued in his assistant manager.

"I am wondering," the little Brazilian said, "if it was really accidental." Their eyes locked again, held for a long moment. "Ellfive Prime has been orbiting for fifty years. Discounting early casualties throughout the war, the colony has had twenty-seven fatal mishaps among OrbGen employees. Fourteen of them occurred during the last few days of the victim's tour on the colony."

"That's hard data?"

Another nod.

"You're trying to say they're suicides."

"I am trying not to think so." A devout Catholic, Reina spoke hesitantly.

Maybe he's afraid God is listening. I wish I thought He would. "Can't say I'd blame some of them," Almquist said aloud, remembering. "But not Yves Versky. Too young, too much to live for."

"You must account for my pessimism," Reina replied.

"It's what we pay you for," Almquist said, trying in vain to make it airy. "Maybe the insurance people could convince OrbGen to sweeten the Earthside trip for returning people. It might be cheaper in the long run."

Emory Reina's face said that was bloody likely. "After I send a repair crew to fix the drizzle from that rain pipe, I could draft a suggestion from you to the insurance group," was all he said.

"Do that." Almquist turned his attention to the desk console. As Reina padded out of the low Center building into its courtyard, the manager committed the accident report to memory storage, then paused. His fingers twitched nervously over his computer-terminal keyboard. Oh, yes, he'd forgotten something, all right. Conveniently.

In moments, Almquist had queried Prime memory for an accident report ten years past. It was an old story in more ways than one. Philip Elroy Hazen: technical editor, born 14 September 2014, arrived on L-5 for first tour to write modification work orders 8 May 2039. Earthsided on 10 May 2041; a standard two-year tour for those who were skilled enough to qualify. A colony tour did not imply any other bonus: The tour was the bonus. It worked out very well for the owning conglomerates that controlled literally everything on their colonies. Almquist's mouth twitched: *well, maybe not literally*...

Hazen had wangled a second tour to the colony on 23 February 2045, implying that he'd been plenty good at his work. Fatal injury accident report filed 20 February 2047.

Uh-huh; uh-huh! Yes, by God, there was a familiar ring to it: a malf in Hazen's radio while he was suited up, doing one last check on a modification to the casting facility. Flung off the tip of the mirror and—Jesus, what a freakish way to go—straight into a mountain of white-hot slag that had radiated like a dying sun near a temporary processing module outside the colony hull. No recovery attempted; why sift ashes?

Phil Hazen; Zen, they'd called him. The guy they used to say needed rollerskates on his hands; but that was envy talking. Almquist had known Zen slightly, and the guy was an absolute terror at sky-bike racing along the zero-g axis of the colony. Built his own tri-wing craft, even gave it a Maltese cross, scarlet polymer wingskin, and a funny name. The *Red Baron* had looked like a joke, just what Zen had counted on. He'd won a year's pay before other sky bikers realized it wasn't a streak of luck.

Hazen had always made his luck. With his sky bike—it was with young seasoned spruce and the foam polymer, fine engineering and better craftsmanship, all disguised to lure the suckers. And all without an engineering degree. Zen had just picked up expertise, never seeming to work at it.

And when his luck ran out, it was—Almquist checked the display—only days before he was slated for Earthside. Uh-huh!

Torin Almquist knew about the shadowy wraiths who somehow dropped from sight on the colony, to be caught later or to die for lack of medical attention or, in a few cases, to find some scam—some special advantage—to keep them hidden on Ellfive Prime. He'd been sure Zen was a survivor, no matter what the accident report said. What was the phrase? A scam, not a

burn; being on the scam wasn't quite the same. A scam wasn't down and out of resources; he was down and out of sight. Maybe the crafty Zen had engineered another fatality that wasn't fatal.

Almquist hadn't caught anyone matching the description of Zen. Almost, but not quite. He thought about young Yves Versky, whose medical report hadn't been all that bad, then considered Versky's life expectancy on the colony versus his chances Earthside. Versky had been a sharp hard-worker too. Almquist leaned back in his chair again and stared at his display. He had no way of knowing that Reina's rain-pipe crew was too late to ward off disaster.

A rain pipe had been leaking long before Grounds Maintenance realized they had a problem. Rain was a simple matter on Ellive Prime: You built a web of pipes with spray nozzles that ran the length of the colony. From ground level the pipes were nearly invisible, thin lines connected by crosspieces in a great cylindrical net surrounding the colony's zero-g axis. Gravity loading near the axis was so slight that the rain pipes could be anchored lightly.

Yet now and then, a sky biker would pedal foolishly from the zero-g region or would fail to compensate for the gentle rolling movement generated by the air itself. That was when the rain pipes saved somebody's bacon and on rare occasions suffered a kink. At such times, Almquist was tempted to press for the outlawing of sky bikes until the rabid sports association could raise money for a safety net to protect people and pipes alike. But the cost would have been far too great: It would have amounted to a flat prohibition of sky bikes.

The problem had started a month earlier with a mild collision between a sky bike and a crosspiece. The biker got back intact, but the impact popped a kink on the underside of the attached rain pipe. The kink could not be seen from the colony's axis. It might possibly have been spotted from floor level with a good, powerful telescope.

Inspection crews used safety tethers, which loaded the rain pipe just enough to close the crack while the inspector passed. Then the drizzle resumed for as long as the rain continued. Thereafter, the thrice-weekly afternoon rain from that pipe had been lessened in a line running from Ellive Prime's Hilton Hotel, past the prized hill, over the colony's one shallow lake, to work-staff apartments that stretched from the lake to the North end cap, where crops were grown. Rain was lessened, that is, everywhere but over the pine-covered hill directly below the kink. Total rainfall was unchanged; but the hill got three times its normal moisture, which gradually soaked down through a forty-year accumulation of ponderosa needles and humus, into the soil below.

In this fashion the hill absorbed one hundred thousand kilograms too much water in a month. A little water percolated back to the creek and the lake it fed. Some

of it was still soaking down through the humus overburden. And much of it—far too much—was held by the underlying slope soil, which was gradually turning to ooze. The extra mass had already caused a barely detectable shift in the colony's spin axis. Almquist had his best troubleshooter, Lee Shumway, quietly checking the hull for a structural problem near the hull blister.

Suzanne Nagel was a lissome widow whose second passion was for her sky bike. She had been idling along in zero-g, her chain-driven propeller a soft whirr behind her, when something obscured her view of the hill far below. She kept staring at it until she was well beyond the leak, then realized the obstruction was a spray of water. Suzy sprint-pedaled the rest of the way to the end cap, and five minutes later the rains were canceled by Emory Reina.

Thanks to Suzy Nagel's stamina, the slope did not collapse that day. But working from inspection records, Reina tragically assumed that the leak had been present for

Almquist knew about the shadowy wraiths who somehow dropped from sight on the colony, to be caught later or to die for lack of medical attention or, in a few cases, to find some scam.

perhaps three days instead of a month. The hill needed something—a local vibration, for example—to begin the mud slide that could abruptly displace up to two hundred thousand tons of mass downslope. Which would inevitably bring on the nightmare more feared than meteorites by every colony manager: spinquake. Small meteorites could only damage a colony, but computer simulations had proved that if the spin axis shifted suddenly a spinquake could crack a colony like an egg.

The repair crew was already in place high above when Reina brought his electrobout three-wheeler to a halt near a path that led up to the pines. His belt-comm set allowed direct contact with the crew and instant access to all channels, including his private scrambler to Torin Almquist.

"I can see the kink on your video," Reina told the crew leader, studying his belt-slung video. "Sleeve it and run a pressure check. We can be thankful that a leak that large was not over Hilton Prime," he added, laughing. The retired OrbGen executives who luxuriated in the hotel would have screamed raw murder, of course. And the leak would have been noticed.

Scanning the dwarf apple trees at the foot of the slope, Reina's gaze moved to the winding footpath. In the forenoon quietude, he could hear distant swimmers cavorting in the slightly reduced gravity of the Hilton pool near the South end cap. But somewhere above him on the hill, a large animal thrashed clumsily through the pines. It wasn't one of the half-tame deer; only maladroitness made that much commotion on Ellive Prime. Straining to locate the hiker, Reina saw the leaning trees. He blinked. No trick of eyesight; they were really leaning. Then he saw the long shallow mud slide, no more than a portent of its potential, that covered part of the footpath. For perhaps five seconds, his mind grasping the implication of what he saw, Reina stood perfectly still. His mouth hung open.

In deadly calm, coding the alarm on his scrambler circuit: "Torin, Emory Reina. I have a Code Three on the hill. And," he swallowed hard, "potential Code One. I say again, Code One; mud slides on the main-path side of the hill. Over." Then Reina began to shout toward the pines.

Code Three was bad enough: a life in danger. Code Two was more serious still, implying an equipment malfunction that could affect many lives. Code One was reserved for colony-wide disaster. Reina's voice shook. He had never called a Code One before.

During the half-minute it took for Almquist to race from a conference to his office, Reina's shouts flushed not one but two men from the hillside. The first, a heavy individual in golf knickers, identified himself testily as Voerster Weston. He stressed that he was not accustomed to peremptory demands from an overall-clad worker. The second man emerged far to Reina's right but kept hidden in a stand of mountain laurel, listening, surmising, sweating.

Reina's was the voice of sweet reason. "If you want to live, Mr. Weston, please lie down where you are. Slowly. The trees below you are leaning outward, and they were not that way yesterday."

"Damnation, I know that much," Weston howled; "that's what I was looking at. Do you know how wet it is up here? I will not lie down on this muck!"

The man in the laurels made a snap decision, cursed, and stood up. "If you don't, two-belly, I'll shoot you here and now," came the voice of Philip Elroy Hazen. Zen had one hand thrust menacingly into a coverall pocket. He was liberally smeared with mud, and his aspect was not pleasant.

"O demonio, another one," Reina muttered. The fat man saw himself flanked, believed Zen's implied lie about a weapon, and carefully levered himself down to the blanket of pine needles. At this moment Torin Almquist answered the Mayday.

There was no way to tell how much soil might slide, but through staccato interchanges Emory Reina described the scene better than his video could show it. Almquist was grim. "We're already monitor-

ing an increase in the off-center spin, Emory; not a severe shift, but it could get to be. Affirmative on that potential Code One. I'm sending a full emergency crew to the blister, now that we know where to start."

Reina thought for a moment, glumly pleased that neither man on the slope had moved. "I believe we can save these two by lowering a safety sling from my crew. They are directly overhead. Concur?"

An instant's pause. "Smart, Emory. And you get your butt out of there. Leave the electrabout, man, just go!"

"With respect, I cannot. Someone must direct the sling deployment from here."

"It's your bacon. I'll send another crew to you."

"Volunteers only," Reina begged, watching the slope. For the moment it seemed firm. Yet a bulge near cosmetically placed slag boulders suggested a second mass displacement. Reina then explained their predicament to the men on the slope, to ensure their compliance.

"It's worse than that," Zen called down. "There was a dugout over there," he pointed to the base of a boulder, "where a woman was living. She's buried, I'm afraid."

Reina shook his head sadly, using his comm set to his work crew. Over four hundred meters above, men were lashing tether lines from crosspieces to distribute the weight of a sling. Spare tethers could be linked by carabiners to make a lifeline reaching to the colony floor. The exercise was familiar to the crew, but only as a drill until now. And they would be hoisting, not lowering.

Diametrically opposite from the hill, troubleshooters converged on the blister where the colony's long-unused reactor and coolant tanks were stored. Their job was simple—in principle.

The reactor subsystems had been designed as portable elements, furnished with lifting and towing lugs. The whole reactor system weighed nearly ten thousand tons, including coolant tanks. Since the blister originally had been built around the stored reactor elements to balance the hill mass, Almquist needed only to split the blister open to space, then lower the reactor elements on quartz cables. As the mass moved out of the blister and away from the hull, it would increase in apparent weight, balancing the downward flow of mud across the hull. Almquist was lucky in one detail: The reactor was not in line with the great solar-mirror strips. Elements could be lowered a long way while repairs were carried out to redistribute the soil.

Almquist marshaled forces from his office. He heard the colony-wide alarm whoop its signal, watched monitors as the colony staff and two thousand other residents hurried toward safety in end-cap domes. His own P-suit, ungainly and dust-covered, hung in his apartment ten paces away. There was no time to fetch it while he was at his post. *Never again*, he promised himself. He divided his attention among monitors showing the evacuation, the blis-

ter team, and the immediate problem above Emory Reina.

Reina was optimistic as the sling snaked down. "South a bit," he urged into his comm set, then raised his voice. "Mr. Weston, a sling is above you, a little north. Climb in and buckle the harness. They will reel you in."

"Now, steady as she goes," Reina said, then, "Stop." The sling collapsed on the turf near the fat man. Reina, fearful that the mud-covered stranger might lose heart, called to assure him that the sling would return.

"I'll take my chances here," Zen called back. The sling could mean capture. The fat man did not understand that any better than Reina did.

Voerster Weston paused halfway into his harness, staring up. Suddenly he was scrambling away from it, tripping in the sling, mindless with the fear of rising into a synthetic sky. Screaming, he fled down the slope. And brought part of it with him.

Reina saw apple trees churning toward him in time to leap atop his electrabout and kept his wits enough to grab branches as the first great wave slid from the slope. He saw Weston disappear in two separate upheavals, swallowed under the mud slide he had provoked. Mauled by hardwood, mired to his knees, Reina spat blood and turf. He hauled one leg free, then the other, pulling at tree limbs. The second man, he saw, had slithered against a thick pine and was now trying to climb it.

Still calm, voice indistinct through his broken jaw, Reina redirected the sling crew. The sling harness bounced upslope near the second man. "Take the sling," Reina bawled.

Now Reina's whole world shuddered. It was a slow, perceptible motion, each displacement of mud worsening the off-center rotation and slight acceleration changes that could bring more mud that could bring worse. . . . Reina forced his mind back to the immediate problem. He could not see himself at its focus.

Almquist felt the tremors, saw what had to be done. "Emory, I'm sending your relief crew back. Shumway's in the blister. They don't have time to cut the blister now; they'll have to blow it open. You have about three minutes to get to firm ground. Then you run like hell to South end cap."

"As soon as this man is in the sling," Reina mumbled. Zen had already made his decision, seeing the glistening ooze that had buried the fat man.

"Now! Right fucking now," Almquist pleaded. "I can't delay it a millisecond. When Shumway blows the blister open it'll be a sudden shake, Emory. You know what that means?"

Reina did. The sharp tremor would probably bring the entire middle of the slope thundering down. Even if the reactor could be lowered in minutes, it would take only seconds for the muck to engulf him. Reina began to pick his way backward across fallen apple trees, wondering why his left

arm had an extra bend above the wrist. He kept a running fire of instructions to the rain-pipe crew as Zen untangled the sling harness. Reina struggled toward safety in pain, patience, reluctance. And far too slowly.

"He is buckled in," Reina announced. His last words were, "Haul away." He saw the mud-spattered Zen begin to rise, swinging in a broad arc, and they exchanged "OK" hand signals before Reina gave full attention to his own escape. He had just reached the edge of firm ground when Lee Shumway, moving with incredible speed in a full P-suit, ducked through a blister airlock and triggered the charges.

The colony floor bucked once, throwing Reina off stride. He fell on his fractured ulna, rolled, opened his mouth—perhaps to moan, perhaps to pray. His breath was bottled by mud as he was flung beneath a viscous gray tide that rolled numberless tons of debris over him.

The immense structure groaned, but held. Zen swayed sickeningly as Ellfive Prime shook around him. He saw Reina die, watched helplessly as a retiree home across the valley sagged and collapsed. Below him, a covey of Quetzal birds burst from the treetops like jeweled scissors in flight. As he was drawn higher he could see more trees slide.

The damage worsened; too many people had been too slow. The colony was rattling everything that would rattle. Now it was all rattling louder. Somewhere, a shrill whistle keened as precious air and more precious water vapor rushed toward a hole in the sunlight windows.

When the shouts above him became louder than the carnage below, Zen began to hope. Strong arms reached for his and moments later he was attached to another tether. "I can make it from here," he said, calling his thanks back as he hauled himself toward the end-cap braces.

A crew man with a video comm set thrust it toward Zen as he neared a ladder. "It's for you," he said, noncommittal.

For an instant, an eon, Zen's body froze, though he continued to waft nearer. Then he shrugged and took the comm set as though it were ticking. He saw a remembered face in the video. Wrapping an arm around the ladder, he nodded to the face. "Don Bellows here," he said innocently.

Pause, then a snarl: "You wouldn't believe my mixed emotions when I recognized you on the monitor. Well, *Mister Bellows*, Adolf Hitler here." Almquist went on, "Or you'll think so damned quick unless you're in my office as fast as your knuckles will carry you."

The crew man was looking away, but he was tense. He knew. Zen cleared his throat for a whine. "I'm scared—"

"You've been dead for ten years, Hazen. How can you be scared? Frazer there will escort you; his instructions are to brain you if he has to. I have sweeping powers right now. Don't con me and don't argue; I need you right here, right now."

By the time Zen reached the terraces with their felled, jumbled crops, the slow shakes had subsided. They seemed to diminish to nothing as he trotted, the rangy Frazer in step behind, to an abandoned electrabout. Damage was everywhere, yet the silence was oppressive. A few electrical fires were kindling in apartments as they moved toward the Colony Center building. Some fires would be out, others out of control, in minutes. The crew man gestured Zen through the courtyard and past two doors. Torin Almquist stood looming over his console display, ignoring huge shards of glass that littered his carpet.

Almquist adjusted a video monitor. "Thanks, Frazer; would you wait in the next room?" The crew man let his face complain of his idleness but complied silently. Without glancing from the monitors, Almquist transfixed the grimy Zen. "If I say the word, you're a dead man. If I say a different word, you go Earthside in manacles. You're still here only because I wanted you here all the time, just in case I ever needed you. Well, I need you now. If you hadn't been dropped into my lap we'd have found you on a Priority One. Never doubt that."

"If I say a third word, you get a special assistant's slot—I can swing that—for as long as I'm here. All I'm waiting for is one word from you. If it's a lie, you're dead meat. Will you help Ellfive Prime? Yes or no?"

Zen considered his chances. Not past that long-legged Frazer. They could follow him on monitors for some distance anyhow unless he had a head start. "Given the right conditions," Zen hazarded.

Almquist's head snapped up. "My best friend just died for you, against my better judgment. Yes or no."

"Yes. I owe you nothin', but I owe him somethin'."

Back to the monitors, speaking to Zen: "Lee Shumway's crew has recovered our mass balance, and they can do it again if necessary. I doubt there'll be more mud slides, though; five minutes of spinquakes should've done it all."

Zen moved to watch over the tall man's bare arms. Two crews could be seen from a utility tug monitor, rushing to repair window leaks where water vapor had crystallized in space as glittering fog. The colony's external heat radiator was in massive fragments, and the mirrors were jammed in place. It was going to get hot in Ellfive Prime. "How soon will we get help from other colonies?"

Almquist hesitated. Then, "We won't, unless we fail to cope. OrbGen is afraid some other corporate pirate will claim salvage rights. And when you're on my staff, everything I tell you is privileged data."

"You think the danger is over?"

"Over?" Almquist barked a laugh that threatened to climb out of control. He ticked items off on his fingers. "We're losing water vapor; we have to mask mirrors and repair the radiator, or we fry; half our crops are ruined and food stores may not last; and most residents are hopeless clods who have no idea how to fend for themselves."

Now d'you see why I diverted searches when I could've taken you twice before?"

Zen's mouth was a cynical curve.

Almquist: "Once when you dragged a kid from the lake filters I could've had you at the emergency room." Zen's eyebrows lifted in surprised agreement. "And once when a waiter realized you were scamming food from the Hilton service elevator."

"That was somebody else, you weren't even close. But okay, you've been a real sweetheart. Why?"

"Because you've learned to live outside the system! Food, shelter, medical help, God knows what else: you have another system that hardly affects mine, and now we're going to teach your tricks to the survivors. This colony is going to make it. You were my experimental group, Zen. You just didn't know it." He rubbed his chin reflectively. "By the way, how many guys are on the scam? Couple of dozen?" An optimist, Torin Almquist picked what he considered a high figure.

A chuckle. "Couple of hundred, you mean." Zen saw slack-jawed disbelief and went on: "They're not all guys. A few growing families. There's Wandering Mary, Maria Polyakova; our only registered nurse, but I found her dugout full of mud this morning. I hope she was sleepin' out."

"Can you enlist their help? If they don't help, this colony can still die. The computer says it will, as things stand now. It'll be close, but we won't make it. How'd you like to take your chances with a salvage crew?"

"Not a chance. But I can't help just standing here swappin' wind with you."

"Right." Eyes bored into Zen's, assessing him. The thieves' argot, the be-damned-to-you gaze, suggested a man who was more than Hazen had been. "I'll give you a temporary pass. See you here tomorrow morning; for now, look the whole colony over, and bring a list of problems and solutions as you see 'em."

Zen turned to leave, then looked back. "You're really gonna let me just walk right out." A statement of wonder, and of fact.

"Not without this," Almquist said, scribbling on a plastic chit. He thrust it toward Zen. "Show it to Frazer."

Inspecting the cursive scrawl: "Doesn't look like much."

"Mas que nada," Almquist smiled, then looked quickly away as his face fell. *Better than nothing*; his private joke with Emory Reina. He glanced at the retreating Zen and rubbed his forehead. Grief did funny things to people's heads. To deny a death you won't accept, you invest his character in another man. Not very smart when the other man might betray you for the sheer fun of it. Torin Almquist massaged his temples and called Lee Shumway. They still had casualties to rescue.

Zen fought a sense of unreality as he moved openly in broad daylight. Everyone was lost in his own concerns. Zen hauled one scam from his plastic bubble under the lake surface, half dead in stagnant air after

mud from the creek swamped his air exchanger. An entire family of scams, living as servants in the illegal basement they had excavated for a resident, had been crushed when the foundation collapsed.

But he nearly wept to find Wandering Mary safe in a secret conduit, tending to a dozen wounded scams. He took notes as she told him where her curative herbs were planted and how to use them. The old girl flatly refused to leave her charges, her black eyes flashing through wisps of gray hair, and Zen promised to send food.

The luck of Sammy the Touch was holding strong. The crop compost heap that covered his half-acre foam shell seemed to insulate it from ground shock as well. Sammy patted his little round tummy, always a cheerful sign, as he ushered Zen into the bar where, on a good night, thirty scams might be gathered. If Zen was the widest-ranging scam on Ellfive Prime, Sammy the Touch was the most secure.

Zen accepted a glass of potato vodka—Sammy was seldom *that* easy a touch—and allowed a parody of the truth to be drawn from him. He'd offered his services to an assistant engineer, he said, in exchange for unspecified future privileges. Sammy either bought the story or took a lease on it. He responded after some haggling with the promise of a hundred kilos of "medicinal" alcohol and half his supply of bottled methane. Both were produced from compost precisely under the noses of the crop crew, and both were supplied on credit. Sammy also agreed to provision the hidden infirmary of Wandering Mary. Zen hugged the embarrassed Sammy and exited through one of the conduits, promising to pick up the supplies later.

Everywhere he went, Zen realized, the scams were coping better than legal residents. He helped a startlingly handsome middle-aged blonde douse the remains of her smoldering wardrobe. Her apartment complex had knelt into its courtyard and caught fire.

"I'm going to freeze tonight," Suzy Nagel murmured philosophically.

He eyed her skimpy costume and doubted it. Besides, the temperature was slowly climbing, and there wouldn't be any night until the solar mirrors could be pivoted again. There were other ways to move the colony to a less reflective position, but he knew Almquist would try the direct solutions first.

Farmer Brown—no one knew his original name—wore his usual stolen agronomy-crew coverall as he hawked his pack load of vegetables among residents in the low-rent area. He had not assessed all the damage to his own crops, tucked and es-paliered into corners over five square kilometers of the colony. Worried as he was, he had time to hear a convincing story. "Maybe I'm crazy to compete against myself," he told Zen, "but you got a point. If a salvage outfit takes over, it's kaymag." KMAg: Kiss my ass good-bye. "I'll sell you

seeds, even breeding pairs of hamsters, but don't ask me to face the honchos in person. You remember about the vigilantes, ol' scam."

Zen nodded. He gave no thought to the time until a long shadow striped a third of the colony floor. One of the mirrors had been coaxed into pivoting. Christ, he was tired—but why not? It would have been dark long before, on an ordinary day. He sought his sleeping quarters in Jean Neruda's apartment, hoping Neruda wouldn't insist on using Zen's eyesight to fill out receipts. Their arrangement was a comfortable quid pro quo, but please, thought Zen, not tonight!

He found a more immediate problem than receipts. Yves Versky slumped, trembling, in the shambles of Neruda's place, holding a standard emergency oxygen mask over the old man's face. The adjoining office had lost one wall in the spinquake, moments after the recycling crew ran for end-cap domes.

"I had to hole up here," Versky gasped, exhausted. "Didn't know where else to go. Neruda wouldn't leave either. Then the old fool smelled smoke and dumped his goldfish bowl on a live power line. Must've blown half the circuits in his body." Like a spring-wound toy, Versky's movements and voice diminished. "Took me two hours of mouth-to-mouth before he was breathing steady. Zen. Boy, have I got a headache."

Versky fell asleep holding the mask in place. Zen could infer the rest. Neruda, unwilling to leave familiar rooms in his advancing blindness. Versky, unwilling to abandon a life, even that of a half-electrocuted, crotchety old man. Yet Neruda was right to stay put: Earthside awaited the OrbGen employee whose eyes failed.

Zen lowered the inert Versky to the floor, patted the big man's shoulder. More than unrelenting care, he had shown stamina and first-aid expertise. Old Neruda awoke once, half-maniac, half-just disoriented. Zen nursed him through it with surface awareness. On another level he was cataloguing items for Almquist, for survivors, for Ellfive Prime.

And on the critical level a voice in him jeered, *bullshit: For yourself*. Not because Almquist or Reina had done him any favors, but because Torin Almquist was right. The colony manager could find him eventually; maybe it was better to rejoin the system now, on good terms. Besides, as the only man who could move between the official system and the scam counterculture, he could really wheel and deal. It might cause some hard feelings in the conduits, but ... Zen sighed, and slept. Poorly.

It was two days before Zen made every contact he needed, two more when Almquist announced that Ellfive Prime would probably make it. The ambient temperature had stabilized. Air and water losses had ceased. They did not have enough stored food to provide three thousand daily calories per person beyond twenty days,

but crash courses in multicropping were suddenly popular, and some immature crops could be eaten.

"It'd help if you could coax a few scams into instructing," Almquist urged as he slowed to match Zen's choppy pace. They turned from the damaged crop terraces toward the Center.

"Unnn-likely," Zen intoned. "We still talk about wartime, when vigilantes tried to clean us out. They ushered a couple of nice people out of airlocks, naked, which we think was a little brusque. Leave it alone; it's working."

A nod. "Seems to be. But I have doubts about the maturing rates of your seeds. Why didn't my people know about those hybrid daikon radishes and tomatoes?"

"You were after long-term yield," Zen shrugged. "This hot weather will ripen the stuff faster, too. We've been hiding a dozen short-term crops under your nose, including dandelions better than spinach. Like hamster haunch is better'n rabbit, and a lot quicker to grow."

Almquist could believe the eighteen-day gestation period, but was astonished at the size of the breeding stock. "You realize your one-kilo hamsters could be more pet than protein?"

"Not in our economy," Zen snorted. "It's hard to be sentimental when you're down and out. Or stylish either." He indicated his frayed overalls. "By the time the rag man gets this, it won't yield three meters of dental floss."

Almquist grinned for the first time in many days. What his new assistant had forgotten in polite speech, he made up in the optimism of a young punk. He corrected himself: an *old* punk. "You know what hurts? You're nearly my age and look ten years younger. How?"

It wasn't a specific exercise, Zen explained. It was attitude. "You're careworn," he sniffed. "Beat your brains out for idling plutocrats fifty weeks a year and then wonder why you age faster than I do." Wondering headshake.

They turned toward the Center courtyard. Amused, Almquist said, "You're a plutocrat?"

"Ain't racin' my motors. Look at all the Indians who used to live past a hundred. A Blackfoot busted his ass like I do, maybe ten or twenty weeks a year. They weren't dumb; just scruffy."

Almquist forgot his retort; his desk console was flashing for attention. Zen wandered out of the office, returning with two cups of scam "coffee." Almquist sipped it between calls, wondering if it was really brewed from ground dandelion root, considering how this impudent troll was changing his life, could change it further.

Finally he sat back. "You heard OrbGen's assessment," he sighed. "I'm a God-damned hero, for now. Don't ask me about next year. If they insist on making poor Emory a sacrificial goat to feed ravenous stockholders, I can't help it."

Impassive: "Sure you could. You just let

'em co-opt you." Zen sighed, then released a sad troglodyte's smile. "Like you co-opted me."

"I can unco-opt. Nothing's permanent." "You said it, bubba."

Almquist took a long breath, then cantilevered a forefinger in warning. "Watch your tongue, Hazen. When I pay your salary, you pay some respect." He saw the sullen look in Zen's eyes and bored in. "Or would you rather go on the scam again and get Earthsided the first chance I get? I haven't begun to co-opt you yet," he glowered. "I have to meet with the Colony Council in five minutes—to explain a lot of things, including you. When I get back, I want a map of those conduits the scams built, to the best of your knowledge."

A flood of ice washed through Zen's veins. Staring over the cup of coffee that shook in his hands: "You know I can't do that."

Almquist paused in the doorway, his expression smug. "You know the alternative. Think about it," he said, and turned and walked out.

When Torin Almquist returned, his wastebasket was overturned on his desk. A ripe odor wrinkled his nose for him even before he saw what lay atop the wastebasket like an offering on a pedestal: a lavish gift of human excrement. His letter opener, an antique, protruded from the turd. It skewered a plastic chit, Zen's pass. On the chit, in draftsman's neat printing, full caps: I THOUGHT ABOUT IT.

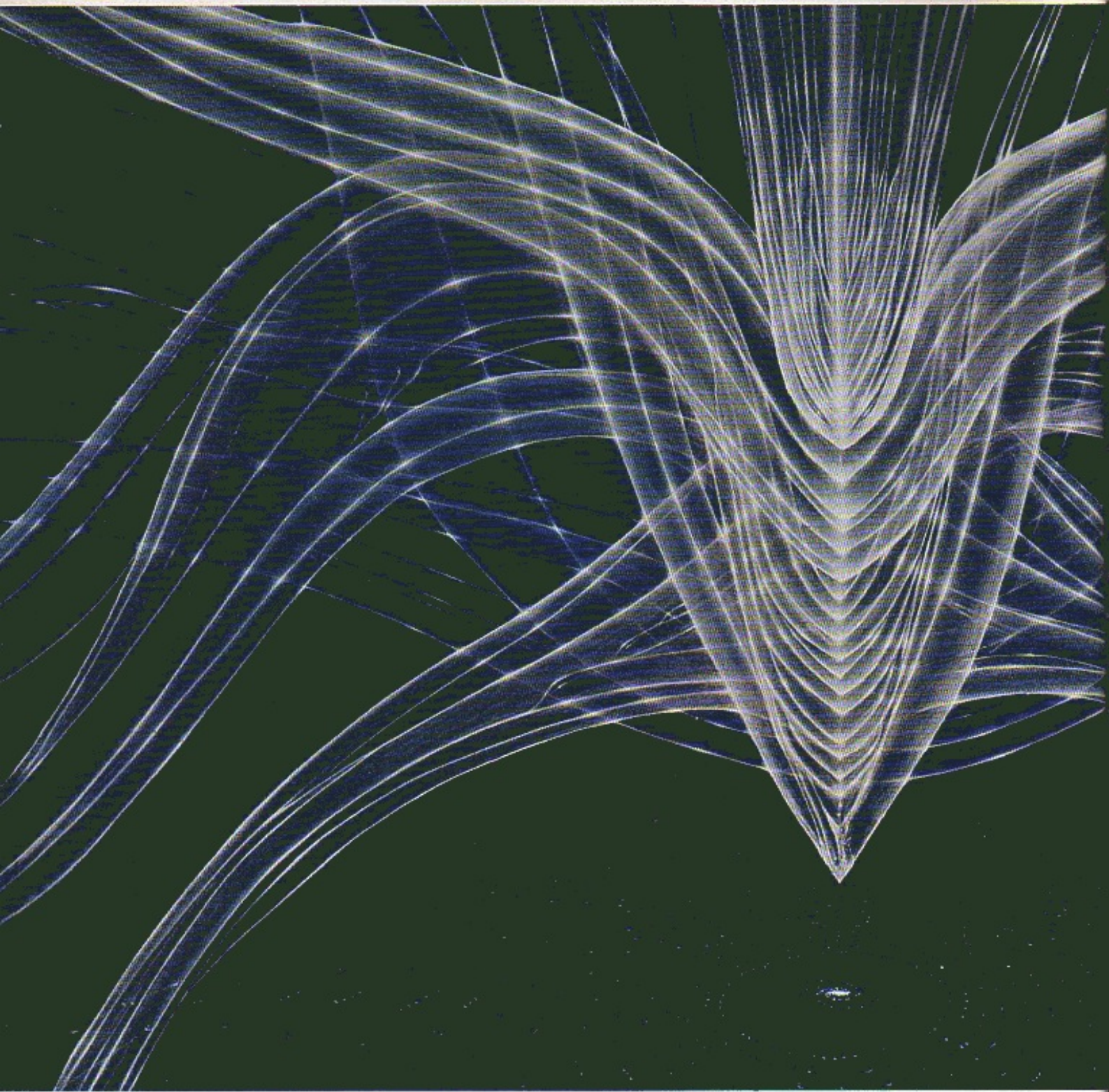
Well, you sure couldn't mistake his answer, Almquist reflected as he dumped the offal into his toilet. Trust Zen to make the right decision.

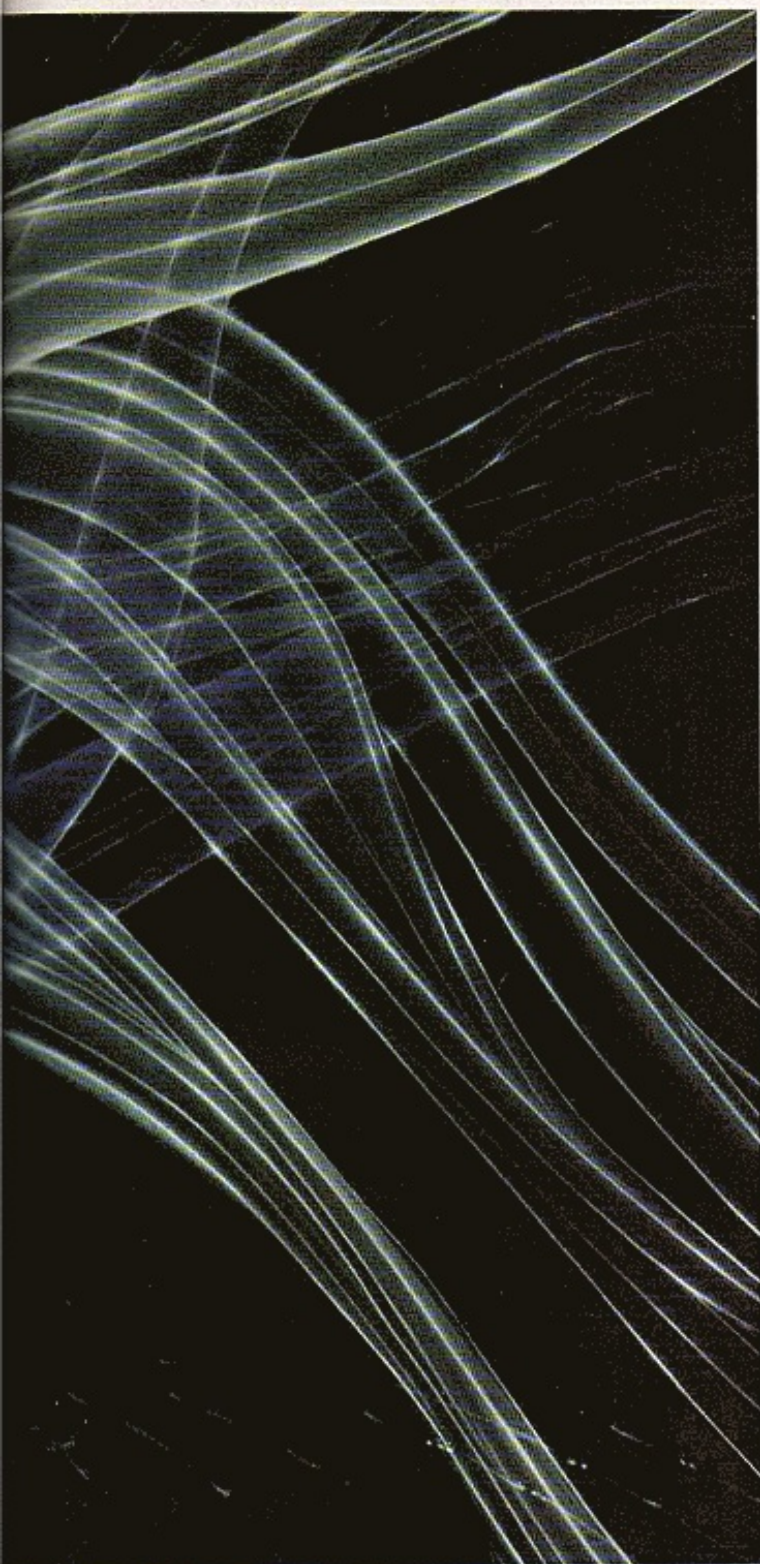
Which way had he gone? Almquist could only guess at the underground warrens built during the past fifty years, but chose not to guess. He also knew better than to mention Zen to the Colony Council. The manager felt a twinge of guilt at the choice, truly no choice at all, that he had forced on Zen—but there was no other way.

If Zen knew the whole truth, he might get careless, and a low profile was vital for the scams. The setup benefited all of Ellfive Prime. Who could say when the colony might once more need the counterculture and its primitive ways?

And that meant Zen had to disappear again, genuinely down and out of reach. If Almquist himself didn't know exactly where the scams hid, he couldn't tell OrbGen even under drugs. And he didn't intend to tell. Sooner or later OrbGen would schedule Torin Almquist for permanent Earthside rotation, and when that day came he might need help in his own disappearance. That would be the time to ferret out a secret conduit, to contact Zen. The scams could use an engineering manager who knew the official system inside out.

Almquist grinned to himself and brewed a cup of dandelion coffee. Best to get used to the stuff now, he reasoned; it would be a staple after he retired, down and out on Ellfive Prime. ☐





He used to search for his own kind, but after the great massacre in his fifteenth season, he hadn't had but a fleeting contact with others—a warble, a rumble, and a squeal that had come to him after endless traveling through the message-carrying waters. Loneliness. That was all any of the others spoke of.

He bellowed his foghorn bellow, feeling the water around him tremble with his giant voice. He rose, the spray of infinite bubbles tickling against his skin, exhaling with a vaporous gush of relief, sucking in precious air. For a moment, suspended above the sea, no longer rising but not yet falling, he squinted in the yellowness of the outer world, feeling the warmth of dry air on his massive head.

WHALE SONG

*Hunting whales
was their way of life—
and path to death.*

BY LEIGH KENNEDY
PAINTING BY BOB VENOSA

Above, a pale-blue flatness struck against the rich blue-green of his world.

Below again, sailing downward, pulling the division between the pale and the rich in a confused whirl behind him, he cried out in a squeal that ended with a honk.

Maybe someday, someone would hear if he called.

Dr. Marsha Scott leaned into the viewscreen as if pressing close would undo the separation between herself and the sea. Inside—a man-rupee of metal and plastic and nylon with gauges, dials, switches, lights, and papers clipped to the walls with strong magnets. Outside—a blue mystery that faded into an opaque universe where odd creatures darted, crept, or floated sleepily.

"Where are you, pretty one?" she called through the viewscreen, searching for a great whale-shape in the foggy water. "Come on, come on, we heard you. Don't be shy." Encapsulated in the submarine, her soft human voice was of little use.

The cabin of the mini-sub was filled with squeals and twitters, sometimes mournful sounds, sometimes comical. The alien metal bubble of the sub was endowed with eeriness from ascending and descending scales—ocean concertos accompanied by the microphone's brooklike interpretation of the water rushing around the sub.

Barbara rose from the pilot's console to stand by Marsha and peer into the screen. "I think I see her. Look there." Barbara's keen pilot's eyes were seldom wrong; something Marsha had learned to appreciate in her. Just as Marsha trusted Barbara underwater, Barbara seemed to defer in the lab. A well-suited pair of researchers needed that kind of trust. Barbara pointed to a vague, distant movement in the upper right corner of the screen. They both watched, wondering whether it was only a cloud-shadow changing the color of the water or a thick school of fish or plankton... or the solo female whale they had traced, earlier in the day, following the trail of irresistible scent they had put out just for her.

The whale made a sound equivalent to a human flapping his lips obscenely.

The two women laughed; though they had heard the same thing endless times, Marsha felt an uncomfortable, guilty happiness. Sometimes she felt as though she should be sad every moment of her life, considering what was happening to her whales. But she couldn't help but feel glorious joy when she was this close.

"Definitely," Barbara said coolly.

They smiled at one another, then Barbara returned to the console. Marsha watched over her shoulder to see the course change. Barbara punched in an 18-degree starboard turn. Marsha looked to her left, checking the tank gauge for the whale "perfume," as they called their solution of pheromones, though to the whales themselves it was more a matter of taste

than scent. The tank was still three-quarters full, though they'd traveled far from the coast leaving a fragrant trail.

Marsha felt the change in course even before she looked back at the viewscreen. She waited to ask, knowing that it would take a distance to be able to discern whether the whale had changed course with the sub.

"Sonar?" she finally asked.

"We're being followed," Barbara said.

Marsha knew, even halfway through her talk, that the lecture rebounded off the Eskimos' emotions. They watched the film of the Japanese whaler-factory ship, not comprehending the significance of massive killing. The tape of whale songs didn't bring even the expected vague smiles of amusement. Mostly men in flannel shirts and jeans, smoking cigarettes until a blue haze lay in layers from the basketball hoops to over their shoulders and round, brown faces like a gauzy blanket; they sat on metal folding chairs in the modern

• The cabin of the mini-sub was filled with squeals and twitters, sometimes mournful sounds, sometimes comical... ocean concertos accompanied by the... water rushing around the sub. •

gymnasium of the village school.

Only two people seemed to show any signs of listening, an old man and a young man. The old one moved restlessly in his folding chair, looked around at other, impassive faces. He seemed horrified by what she said. When she explained that there had been no recent sighting of an adult male bowhead, the old man whispered, "Gone! Gone!" to Marsha's distraction. The younger man—awkward, silent, apart—took a pen and a small notebook out of his shirt pocket every now and then and wrote briefly. The rest sat with their arms crossed or hands on their knees and simply watched her with shuttered expression, having found she would say exactly what they expected. Please, please don't kill any whales this year.

They had heard it before. For years. Marsha knew about the Eskimo—she knew that the whale and the Eskimo had lived a life together for thousands of years; she knew the customs and even a few words.

"Understand," she said, sweating and too warm for the first time in three days,

"we are not asking this because we are anti-Eskimo. There will be no whales ever, ever again if you kill them. The rest of the world has finally stopped. If you will leave them alone, they have a slight chance. At my University, we've been working with a chemical to draw all the whales together at mating season. It's called a pheromone—a hormone like the ones the whales themselves make—that attracts the whales who have gotten separated from schools."

"Clever!" the restless old man muttered, watching her with bright eyes.

Hope. She found herself speaking to him and the note-taking young man, not even seeing the sleepy looks that now graced those other faces.

She finished. "Thank you." And they said nothing. Watched her until she collected her notes and put them into her folder. Fingers and lips trembling, head pounding, she crossed the gymnasium through the rows of folding chairs, across the slick varnished floor, into the dimly lit corridor, looking for the drinking fountain. Behind her, she heard the villagers suddenly come to life. Gulping cold water, she heard the sound of argument. She stood in the doorway and saw the old man getting up from his folding chair, glaring at the man who reached out to his arm as if to convince him to stay.

"George!" one of the other villagers said, wagging his finger at the old man. "Who killed those whales?"

"Leave me alone, dammit!" restless old George said. "Even if they did the slaughtering, they've left us the worst! The worst!"

Marsha watched them bicker for a few moments, talking about centuries of Eskimo life, how the Eskimo look at the world now—bullied by biologists and ecologists, plagued by those bug-eyed, beak-faced people from the south. She felt a hand on her shoulder and saw Dr. Thiel's sympathetic eyes.

"How are you?" he asked.

"I ache," she said.

In the spring, he moved from the warm south to the cooler waters of the north; in the fall he moved southward again. He drifted naturally through his life, thinking about patterns he saw, music he heard, learning new things every season as he migrated from one place to another. He'd become fond of exploring deeper in the trenches, conditioning himself even beyond his innate ability to stay under a long while before surfacing for a breath.

He felt the changes in the water sliding around him as he dipped and glided. A trailing swirl blossomed into oily spirals, a cool taste of the north sifted through his sievelike baleen where the plankton collected in his mouth for a continuous meal, the subtle changes in sounds reverberated through the sea, all giving him a feeling of purpose.

Slowing down to enjoy a bright arrangement of ocean flora—blooming in orange

and pink and pale yellow ruffles, surrounded by softly waving green tendrils—he felt almost content.

He sang.

He was going home.

When the phone rang, Marsha woke completely and not at all. She bolted out of bed without conscious thought, a reflexive response. It took her a few seconds to remember to speak. "Hello."

"Marsh, they're going on the hunt anyway," Barbara said.

She stood dumbly with the phone to her ear, bending over the lamp table, her thigh-length nightshirt not adequate protection against the news that her world was about to be destroyed.

"Marsha?"

"What?" she said breathlessly.

"What are we going to do then? Maybe we could fly up there and talk."

"I don't think so, Barb. I *did* talk."

"What about taking the sub?"

Marsha had considered that already. "We'd never get that far, that fast. Besides, the school wouldn't let us take it on such short notice." Marsha finally sat down in the rocking chair. She liked talking about possibilities, even though she knew there were none. It was comforting. Somehow it gave her the illusion that there was still hope if they talked enough.

"I'm coming over," Barbara said.

"All right."

She hung up and sat in the dark for a long while. Time, distance, time, distance. . . . How to make them less? Less distance. Makes more time. But what. . . .

She stood, rigid with excitement. Then she went to her desk and flipped on the light. On the wall a detailed map of the Pacific stretched across more than a meter of wall space. She traced the lines of various colored pencils, twisting her head this way and that to read the notations. Rubbing her face sleepily, she sat down and punched in a series of numbers on her small calculator. When the doorbell rang, she was still staring up at the map. She got on a pair of jeans and trotted to the doorway. "Barbara," she began right away, "do you still know that fellow with the plane?"

Barbara brightened, aware of a less hopeless tone. "I'll renew my acquaintance tonight if need be."

"Okay." She pulled Barbara by the elbow to her map and pointed to spots along the Bering Sea and north of St. Lawrence Island. "We're going to drop some pheromone into the sea here . . . here . . . and here. . . . I don't know if it will be stronger than the whales' instinct to head north, but if we could lure them south. . . ."

"Of course," Barbara looked at the map a moment, visualizing what had to be arranged. Marsha watched her, knowing that they were going to do it. Neither of them would let by even a slight possibility.

As they slid along the icy pathways,

sometimes they bounced so high that John saw his father almost lose his balance in the seat of the snowmobile. John wanted to be at home instead of out here; not that he cared about the whales—there were always whales, there always would be whales—but he had been teaching his mother to play chess, and that seemed more amusing than the whale hunt. He wondered about the woman from the University. Were the other villagers thinking about her as they wound between the walls of ice twice a man's height?

John wanted to take out his little notebook and look again at the word she had brought with her—"pheromone." A nice sounding word. It had taken him several days to find the word in a dictionary. He'd found "extinct" again, too, and found that he'd gotten it confused with "explicit"; but they were different words altogether, though they sounded good together. Like pheromone sounded, with a "ph" and not an "f." John wondered if anyone else had looked up the word. Perhaps only he, of all the people who lived in the village, knew how the word was spelled and what the dictionary said. After all, he'd had an entire year of accounting at college; he was the only one who carried a notebook and a pen all the time.

They reached the edge of the ice, where the cold sea rippled in a choppy channel. Perhaps they would think the sea too choppy to go out. John got off the snow-

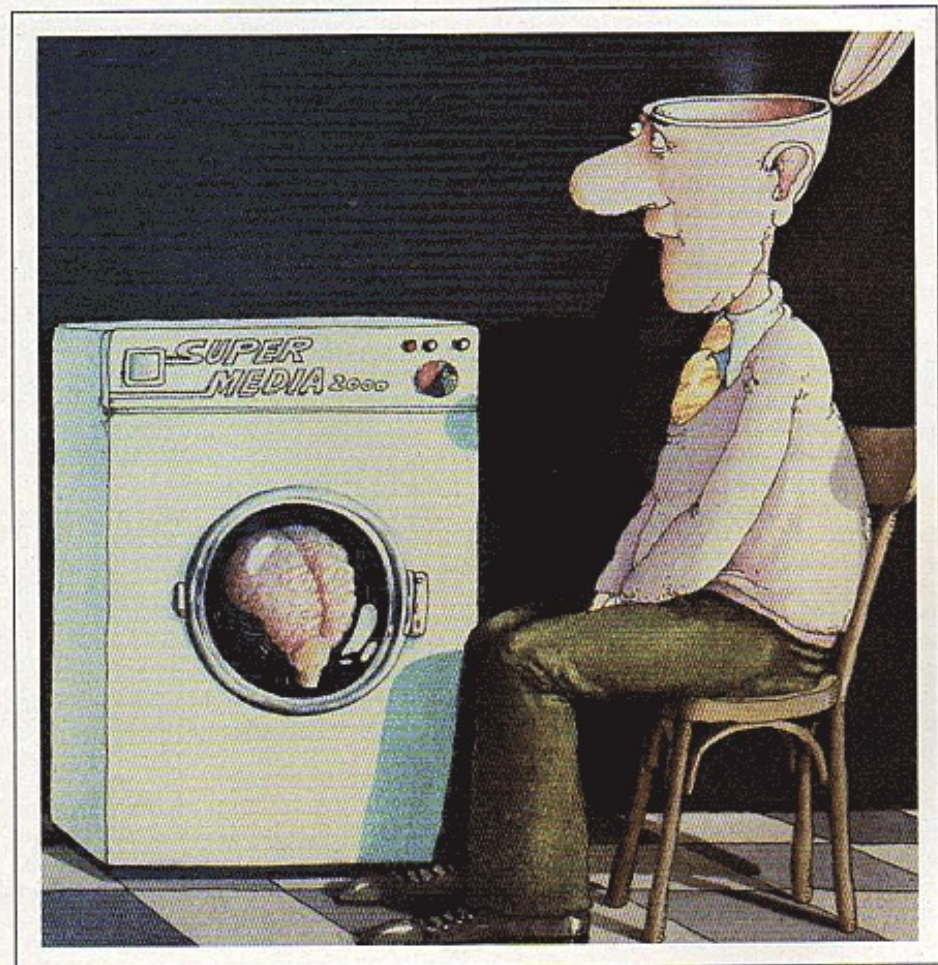
mobile and looked at his father, but his father didn't look at him. He never did.

John understood from his father's actions that they would load the *umiak* right away. As he looked around at the other villagers, each preparing for the hunt, he saw that they were grim. As a boy, he had known the hunt as a glad time, full of expectation and excitement. But things had changed so that the Eskimo had to defy the others from the south. Defiance weighed them down. They smoked and stood at the edge of the ice in their bright orange, blue, or green down-filled jackets, peering out at the sea. A few of the older men still wore their white-skin hunting parkas.

Long ago, the men from the south had come and told them about their God, and how God made the world and everything that happened was God's will. Now the men came out of the green valleys and tall cities to tell the Eskimo that man had slaughtered God's creatures, and they would not come back unless they—who had never killed a great amount of whales—didn't stop the hunt.

John wondered why God didn't put the whales together instead of waiting for the scientists. Could it be that all the tales they brought north were lies?

John helped his father and other men load the yellow-white sealskin *umiak*—a long, slender, silent boat that barely whispered in the water. For thousands of years,



even the acute whales never heard the soft whisper of skins gliding in the cold water. They loaded in food—walrus and sweets—a tent, warm caribou hides, a tool box, ammunition, close-range shoulder guns, inflated orange plastic or sealskin floats which still resembled the seal in a comical way, a box of diversions—magazines and a few western novels. Most important was the harpoon with the little bomb that would shoot into the whale's back and explode within.

"Are we going out?" John asked in surprise.

"Of course!" his father said irritably.

John hadn't heard any whale sounds, and from the others still casually loading their *umiaks* and checking their harpoons, it seemed that no one else had, either.

The boats slid into the sea. John worked his oar hard, not wanting the men to think that the year at college had taken any of the Eskimo out of him. Soon all the boats were out, but one man stood at the edge of the ice. It looked like old George.

They rowed and waited, rowed and waited. No one spoke. The men lit cigarettes and stared at the sea. John read a paperback by a man named Camus, who wrote about a hot, sandy land.

Twilight, midnight, dawn passed again in such a short time that one could almost hear the soft hiss of the pink sun dipping into the sea, resisting with a bounce into the cold blue morning. It was too short for the transition of feeling a new day had come. Instead, it was intermission in a long, long day.

He was glad to rest again, though the silence was oppressive. Arching his back, then rubbing his sore arms, he wondered what his father and the others were thinking through those hours of paddling around and around, waiting for a dark underwater rush, a betraying vapor spout.

The sea had remained silent for several days.

Were they thinking about the woman from the University? Or the lack of whale to divide in the village? Or perhaps the way others would look at them when they paddled back without a catch?

"There aren't any goddamned whales out here," someone said loudly.

John was startled by the sudden voice—a forbidden voice. It snapped the tension so abruptly that he felt a physical confusion in his shoulders and eyes and neck. At once everyone began to speak, relieved to have their anger spilt into each other's ears. John heard them talk about "them" killing all the whales, about starvation, about being exterminated by conservationists and sociologists.

John didn't worry about starvation. He knew that he could get a job with the government after another year of school on government grants. He knew that all the village could move away to work for the oil companies, or the fisheries, or collect welfare. No one would starve. But things would never be the same again.

The village would be extinct—explicitly extinct.

When he mused on the words, it seemed that they had a special meaning that only he could grasp. How could he explain it to them? This combination of sounds—didn't it apply to them, too?

John remembered suddenly that the woman had said that whales were smart. Almost as smart as people, but in a different way. And she had played a tape of the whales talking to each other underwater. It sounded like funny electronic music.

He knew a word that described those sounds. A word from his little notebook that he'd written down a long time ago.

Plaintive.

They dragged the skin *umiaks* up onto the ice floe, grumbling with disgust and frustration. John hesitated as the men all headed for the tents of the hunting camp where they'd spent their futile weeks. John's father looked at him.

"Come on. We're going to have a meeting. Or is that below your dignity, too?"

John shrugged and followed.

They decided to break up camp and appoint a delegation to write a letter to the President. Everyone in the village would sign it. Maybe they would get other villages to sign it, too. Maybe they could get compensation. And maybe they would be on the six o'clock news.

The rest of that morning they packed their harpoons, magazines, and anger onto the snowmobiles. John prepared to ride with his father, but he turned away from John and said, "You ride with George. Tom is going to ride with me so we can talk."

George was slow; John tried to help him, but still they were left behind. John felt a little fear because he'd been left behind, because his father had scolded him. Even with their radios, it wasn't safe to be so far from the village alone. John thought about asking George what he thought about it—was it because they were the only ones who didn't speak during the meeting? Was it because George didn't go out on the hunt, but stayed at the camp? But he didn't want George to know that he'd noticed anything.

They were just about to go. The buzzing motors of the other snowmobiles had faded beyond the mounds of ice between the village and the sea. John and George heard the whale sound at the same time—a great throbbing rumble, wet and strong.

They ran to the edge of the ice and watched as a mass of gray-black rose out of the water, making a tremendous sucking noise. A fountain of vapor shot into the air, then a giant's breath.

John laughed and hurled toward the snowmobile's radio. He had his hand on the switch when George, old and frail as he looked, pulled him away and pushed him down on the ice.

"What did you do that for?" John asked, his pride wounded.

"Do you want to kill the last whale in the world?"

John got to his feet and brushed the sharp ice crystals from his jacket. "There must be more," he said simply.

"Where?" George demanded.

John just looked at George.

"Come and watch." George put his hand on John's shoulder as if to apologize for knocking him down, but he didn't say it. They walked together to the channel and waited. Again, farther out, the fluttering, slurping sound and a black mountain rising out of the sea. The whale swam in a half-circle then arched down for a dive, its shining tail giving a last teasing glimpse.

They stood for a long time, watching the sea.

"It's too late for us," George said. "We're already changed beyond recognition. What do you think my grandfather would say about snowmobiles and radios? About shoulder guns?"

John nodded. He knew this set of thoughts. Every old villager had told every young child about it over and over. He had read one of the books that the sociologists had written—he knew what Eskimos were supposed to be.

"It's probably too late for him," George said, squinting as if to see a rise or ripple on the horizon.

John suddenly understood something. Not something he could put into words like "plaintive" or such, but it had to do with the voice of the whale. The whale was like the last villager. There was no difference. Somehow, both of them had been squeezed out of the world. They were so alike they couldn't destroy each other, could they? John felt that George understood that even better than he did, and he felt less alone inside himself. He wondered why his father and the others didn't have this feeling, too.

Yes, if I were the last whale, I would sing a sad song, too.

He'd felt the danger for weeks, tasting man-ness and potential death in the water. Cautiously, he'd called and called for others. Usually, he heard distantly his kind in the cool summer waters of the north.

This season, he heard nothing. Not one faraway voice rippled the water.

I am lost.

I am alone.

He coasted close to land, in spite of his fear, curious about the alien invasion of the sea. He found nothing and turned back to the sea. Diving deep, he found a warm current with a startling taste-smell.

He traced the taste tentatively at first. Pausing now and then, he tried to resist, not wanting to leave the cool waters. The trail was taking him away, back to winter water. He became warmer and the scent was stronger.

Experimentally, after days of traveling, he called out to meet the bearer of the irresistible scent.

Someone answered. **DO**

*The experiment looked so easy;
except for one factor.*

CONTROLLED EXPERIMENT

BY RICK CONLEY

Standing alone on the podium, in the glare of the camera lights, the old man spoke wearily:

"I have called this press conference to announce my resignation from the American Psionic Institute."

The audience of scientists and reporters buzzed excitedly.

"As cofounder of this organization, I am reluctant to leave it; but my continued presence here can only cast a cloud of doubt over honest men's work. For recently, in my zeal to demonstrate the existence of psychic phenomena, I committed the one unpardonable sin in science: I deliberately manipulated an experiment to yield the desired results."

"A few weeks ago, I implanted in the brains of rats electrodes that, when energized by a random-number generator, produce highly pleasurable sensations in the animals. My objective: to see if the rats could through telekinesis—mind over matter—influence the generator to give more than the expected, chance number of stimulations."

"I reported almost immediate success—clear evidence of psychic ability! But then . . . then some of my colleagues, puzzled by the excessive attention I was paying to my apparatus, watched, concealed, as I manipulated the equipment to deliver additional stimulations to the rats."

The old man sighed.

"Why did I cheat? I don't know. In fact, until my colleagues confronted me with the evidence, I was barely aware of my actions."

"Perhaps after a lifetime of honest research with, at best, ambiguous results to show for it, I subconsciously decided to help the experiment along just a little, in order to encourage my colleagues and to impress the skeptics."

"In any case, I'm sorry for the embarrassment I've caused the Institute. And now I shall

entrust my work to abler, more trustworthy men. In particular, I'm gratified that Dr. John Cole has promised to continue my research with the random stimulator."

"Good luck, John. I know you won't lose control as I did."

Alone in the laboratory, strapped down in a cage, the rats squealed in ecstasy as the machine directed repeated stimulations through the electrodes implanted in their brains.

More! the rats' minds shouted. More! More!

But the machine ignored their demands; it continued to grant the creatures brief moments in paradise according to its own mechanical caprice.

Then the rats tensed. The man! The man was coming!

Seconds later, Dr. Cole unlocked the door to the laboratory and entered. Walking over to the experimental apparatus, he inspected the electronic counter hopefully. He was disappointed to see that in the past hour the rats had received no stimulations beyond chance

expectation. Good thing he was on board.

Peering into the cage at the tiny creatures, he sighed. "Do something, you deadbeats! Do something!"

At that moment, the rats concentrated mightily.

From their minds, at the speed of thought, sprang tendrils of mental energy. Reaching deep into the recesses of Cole's mind, the tendrils touched, probed, twisted.

More! the rats' minds shouted. More! More!

Unconsciously, Cole turned a dial on the random-number generator. The stimulations were no longer random; they came faster and faster.

Even in their heightened ecstasy the rats sensed that this man was not the same one they had . . . touched . . . earlier. But still, he was a man, not a machine, and could be manipulated.

They squealed in delight.

They were in control again. ∞

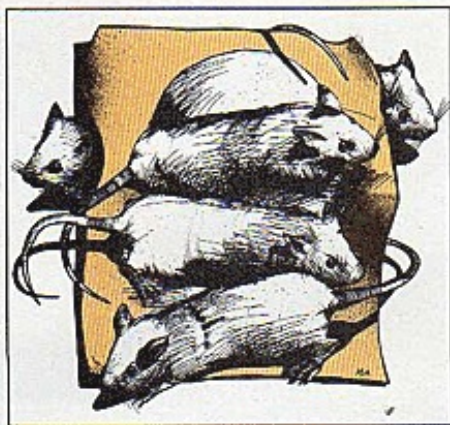


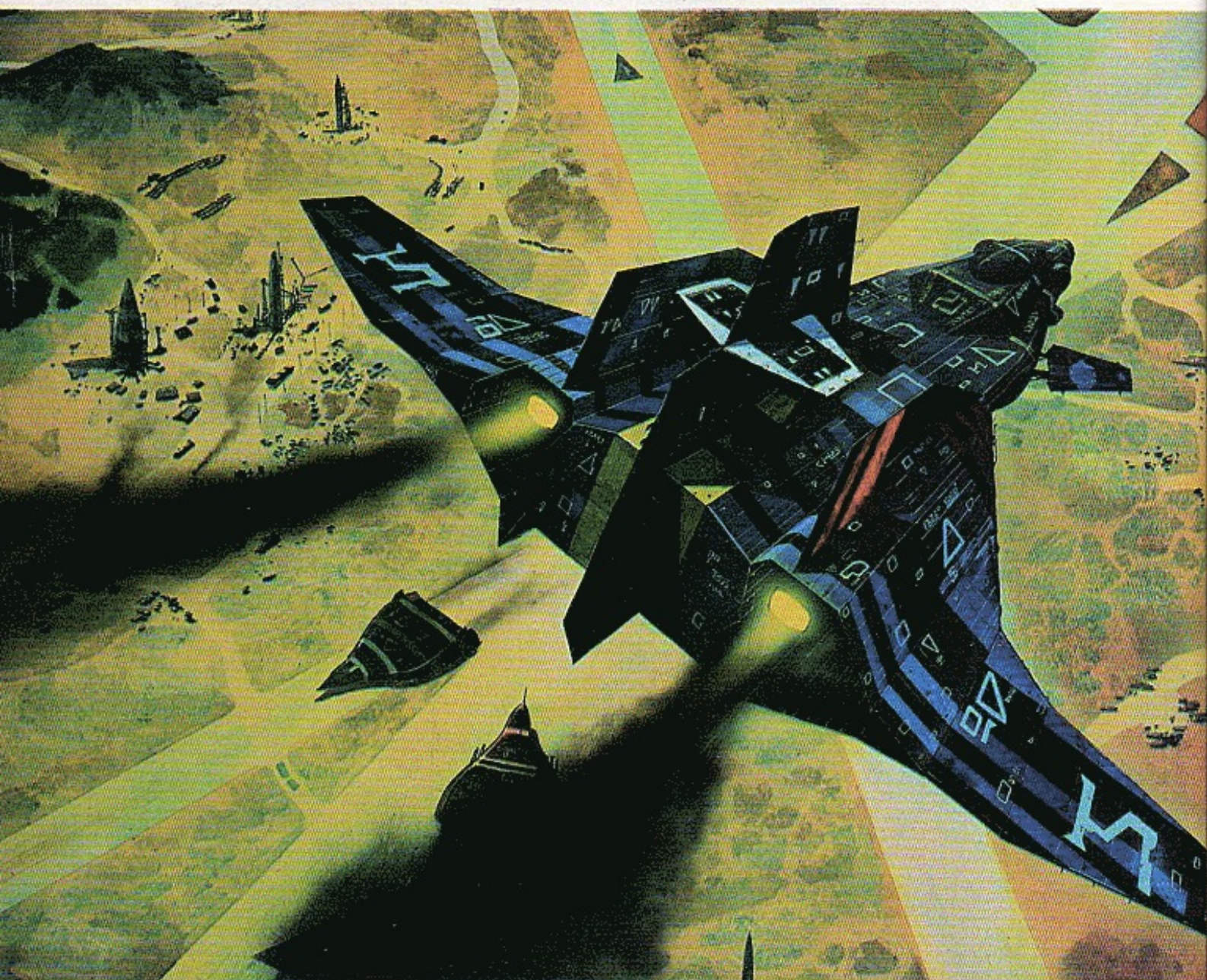
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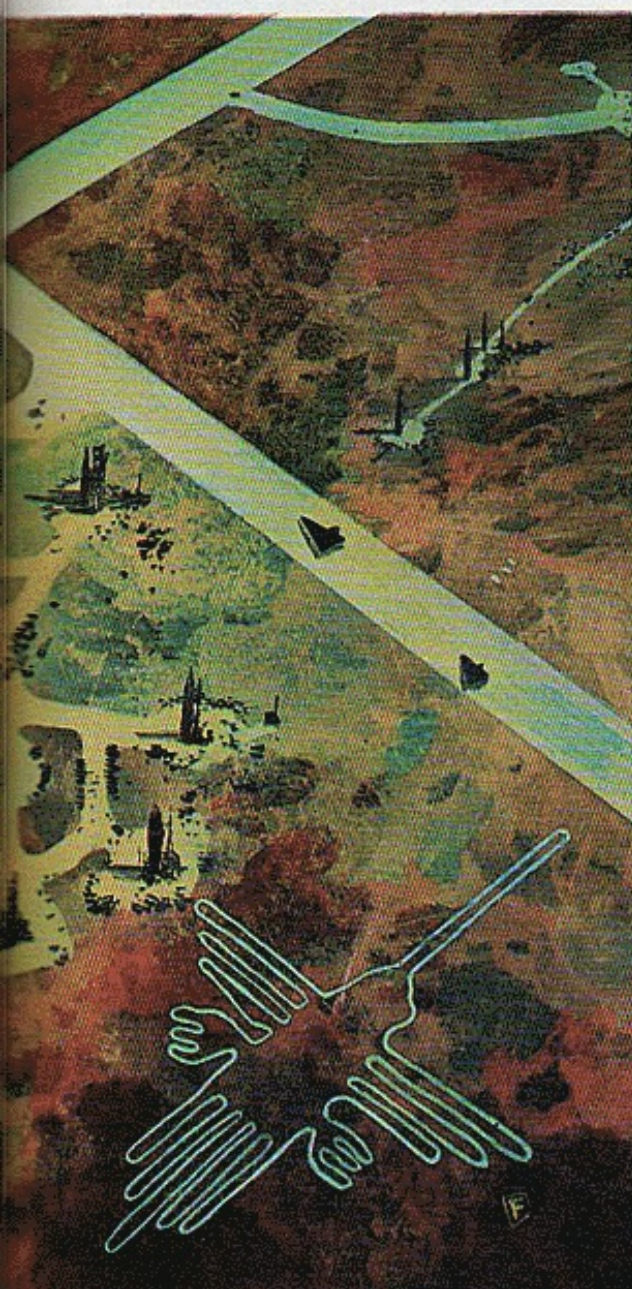
21st-CENTURY FOSS

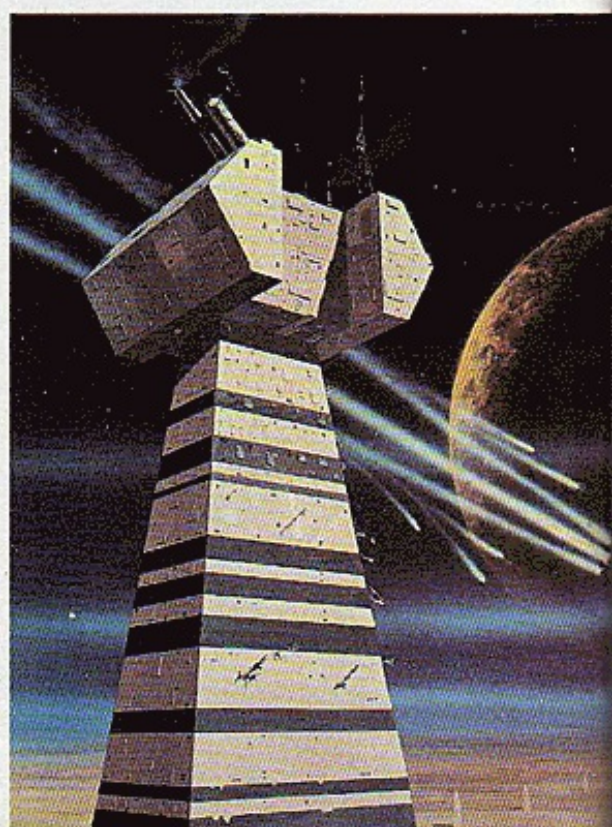
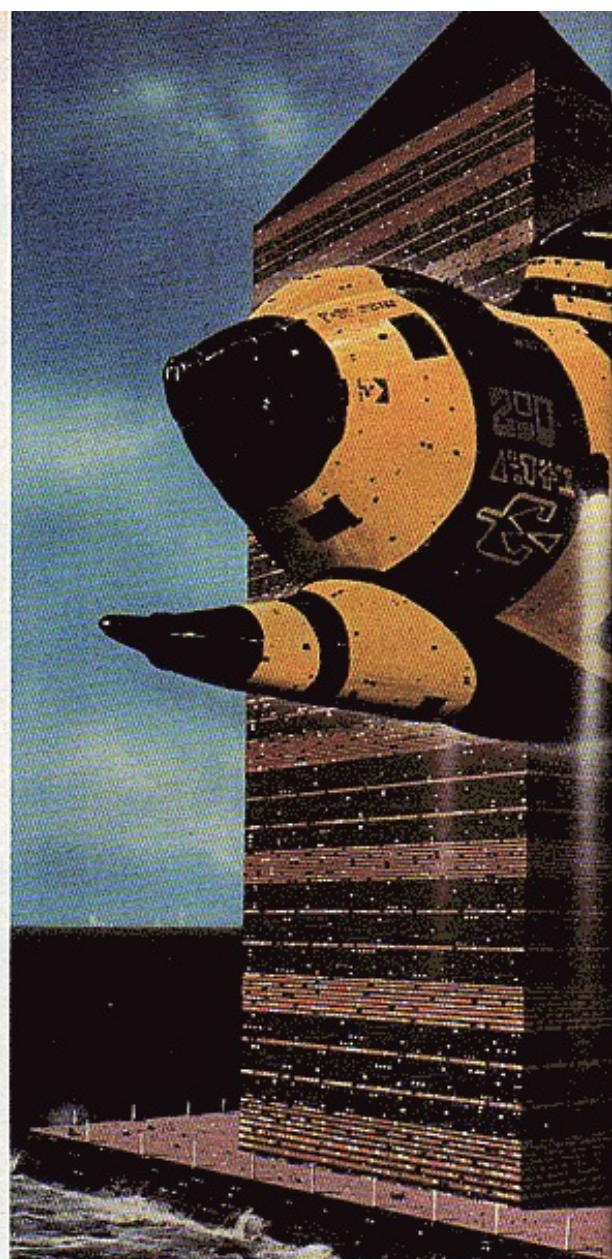
*An interstellar gallery from the acknowledged
master of realism in SF art*

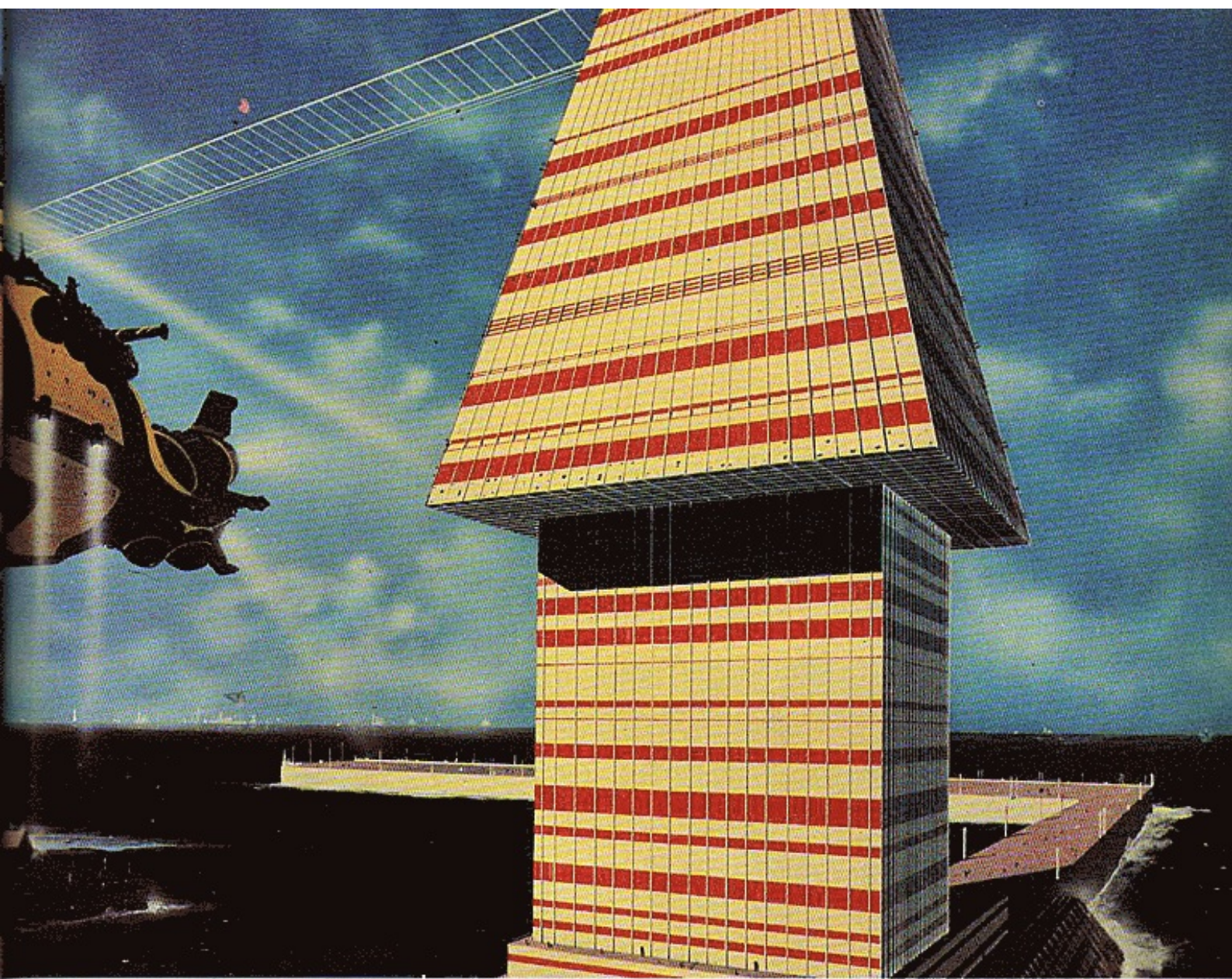
Chris Foss paints spaceships too big for the horizon to hold. He gives form to intergalactic arks that ramjet and ion-drive entire civilizations from one remote star system to another. Foss's eye for detail is meticulous. His ships endure explosions in space battles that often leave them scarred and blasted, limping home

Clockwise from above left: a dogfight in space; "Sea-Horse in the Sky"; an interstellar cruiser; vessel lands at ready-made runways of the Nazca plains in Peru. Foss conveys massive size through attention to minute, precise detail.









to monstrous continental dry docks. Foss says they are "very tatty spaceships." And the curiously antiquated qualities of his vehicles evoke memories of Edwardian ocean liners and World War I tanks. Yet his structures are post-modern, asymmetrical, immense, and totally unlike the needle-nosed and streamlined shapes of his predecessors.

As a child in Devon, England, Chris was fascinated by the remains of the Industrial Revolution, its aging railway stations, the abandoned mines. Obsessed by speed, color, and hybrid technology, he built models of steam engines and rebuilt wrecked cars from scrap metal. Foss's ambition always was to become an artist, but to placate his

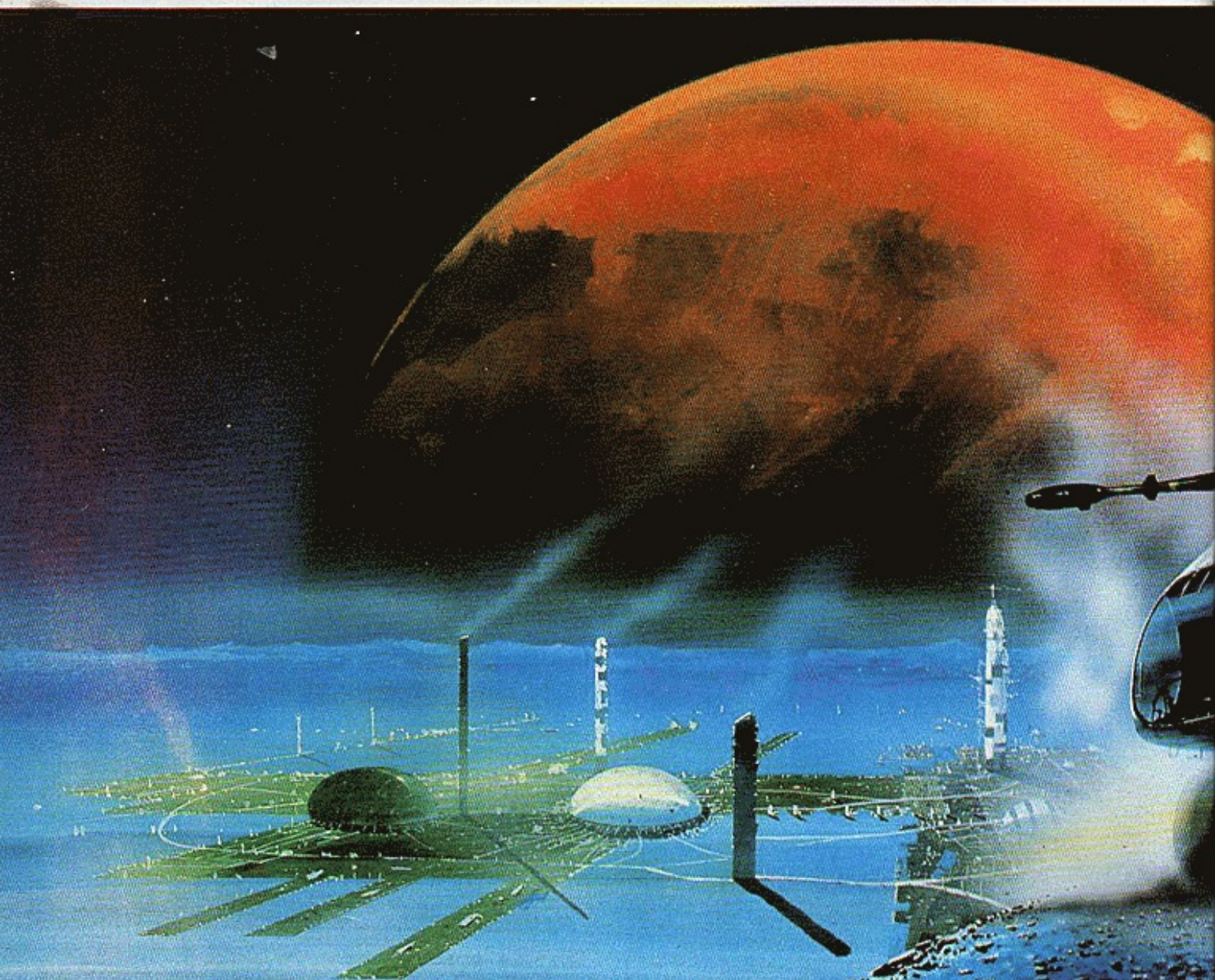
Clockwise from lower right: airbrush painting, "Invasion from Space"; "The Machine in Shaft 10"; "Away and Beyond" shows a spaceport under attack; Foss's conceptualization of twin towers of Atlantis, the mythical metropolis.

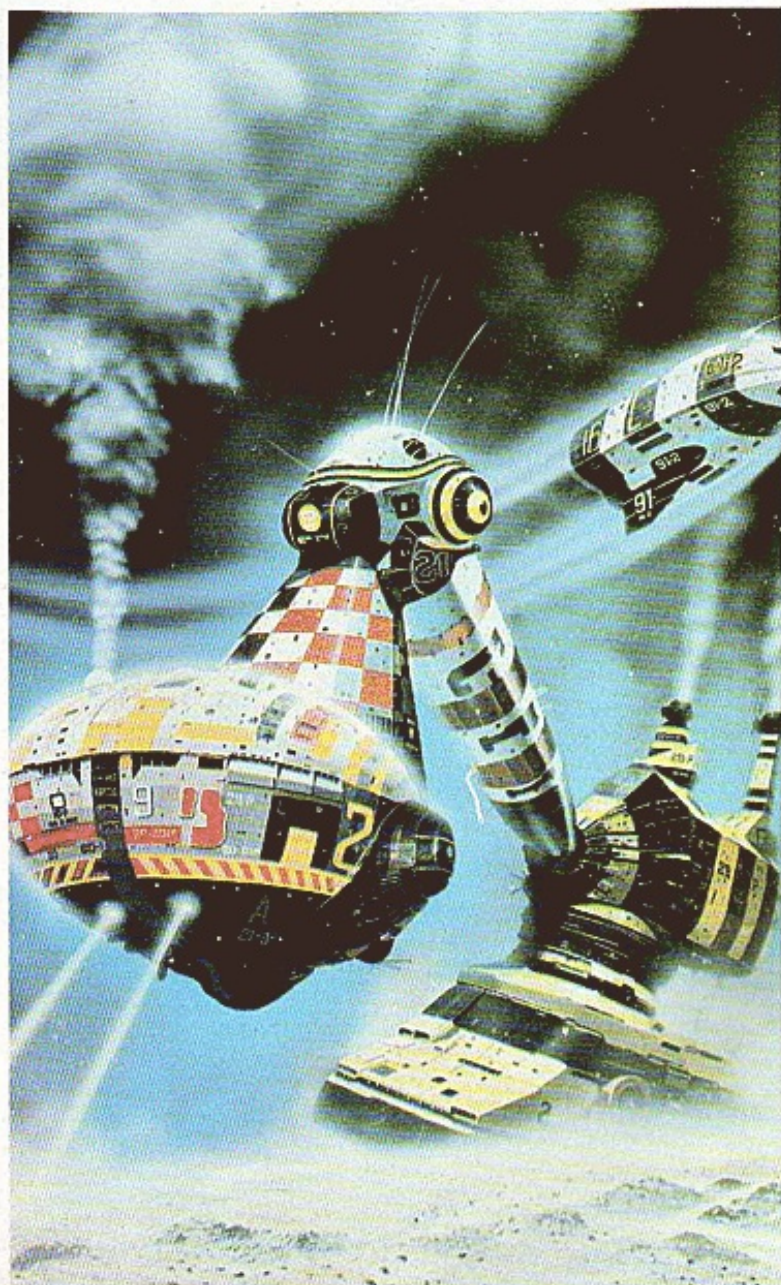
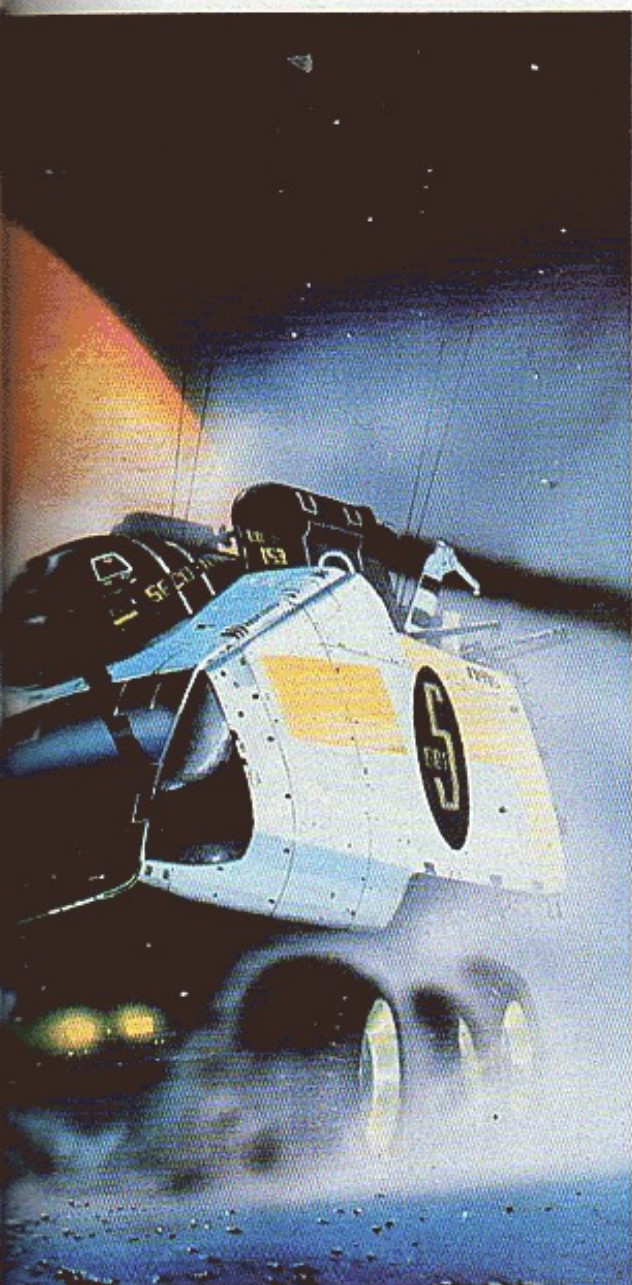
●The giant planetoids of Star Wars are the offspring of Foss's "crazed and rusted leviathans." ●

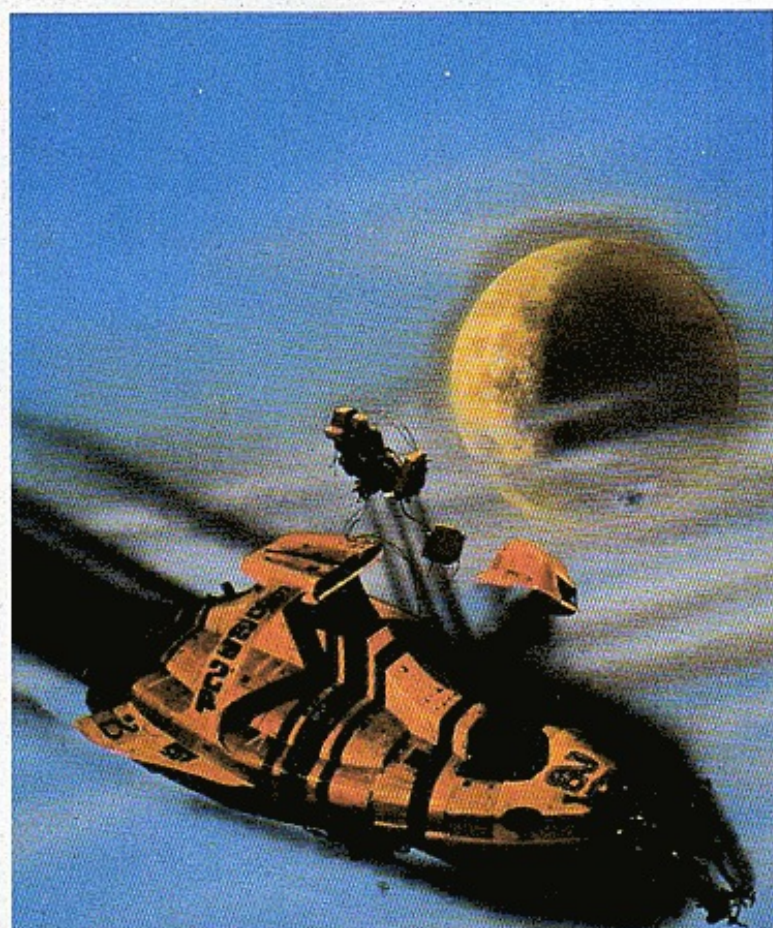
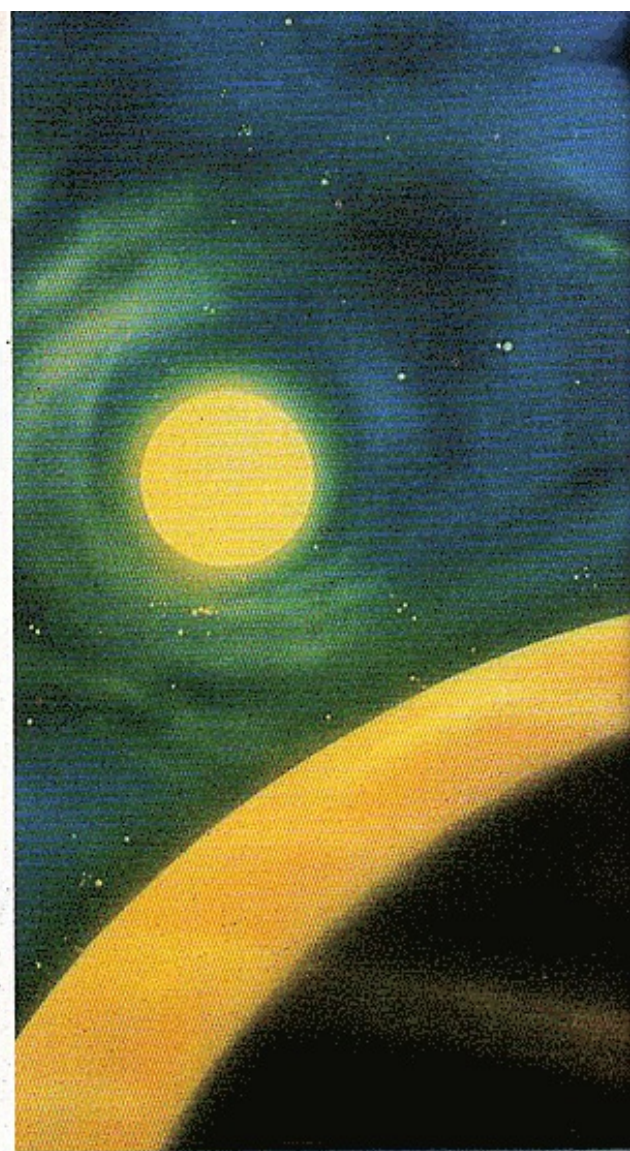
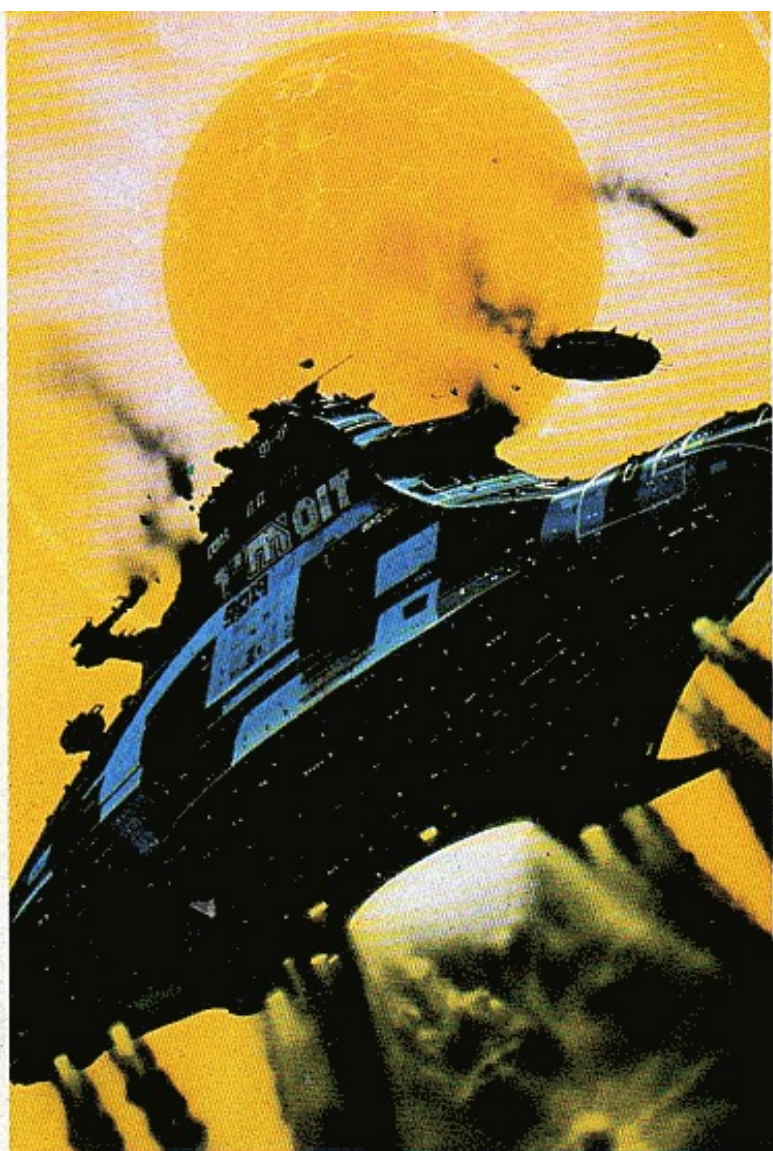
◉ Next to the soul, the most beautiful object in the galaxy is the spaceship. ◉

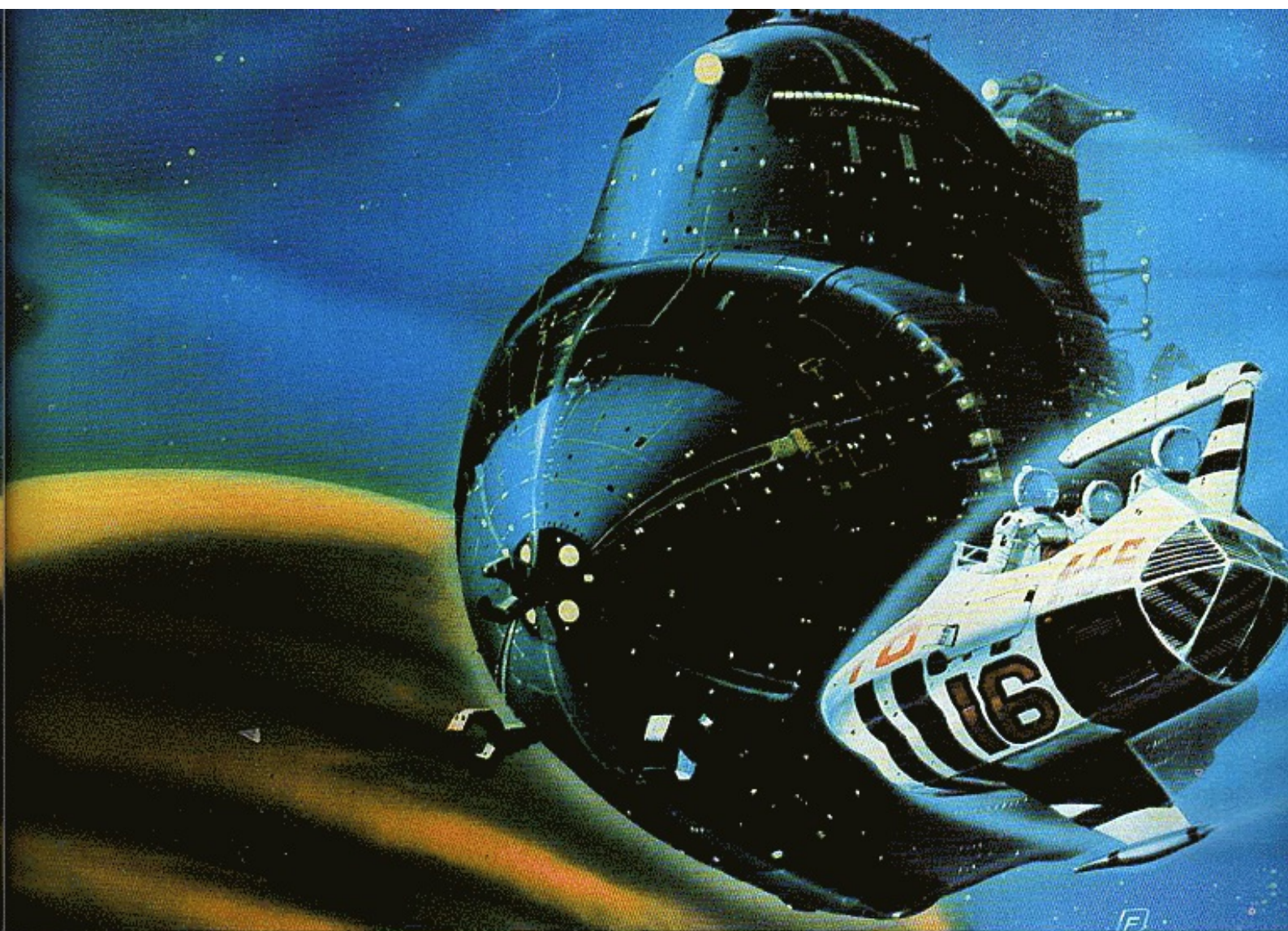
parents, he entered architecture school at Cambridge. While at the university, Foss sold a six-page cartoon strip to Bob Guccione for his British *Penthouse* magazine. Guccione (later to publish *Omni*) was so impressed that he put the artist on retainer so that he could build up his portfolio. Within six years Foss grew into an internationally acclaimed science-fiction artist. Such authors as Asimov and Clarke asked specifically for him to illustrate their novels. Then came the films. Foss's imagery inspired a small army of imitators, including TV and movie designers. Foss was the first to conceptualize the crystalline planet Krypton for the movie *Superman*. Twentieth Century-Fox asked him to

Clockwise from upper left: silicon life forms battle in "The Space Machine"; "A Case of Conscience," an illustration for James Blish's classic novel; cover design for Joe Haldeman's Mindbridge; design for "Quest in Time and Space."





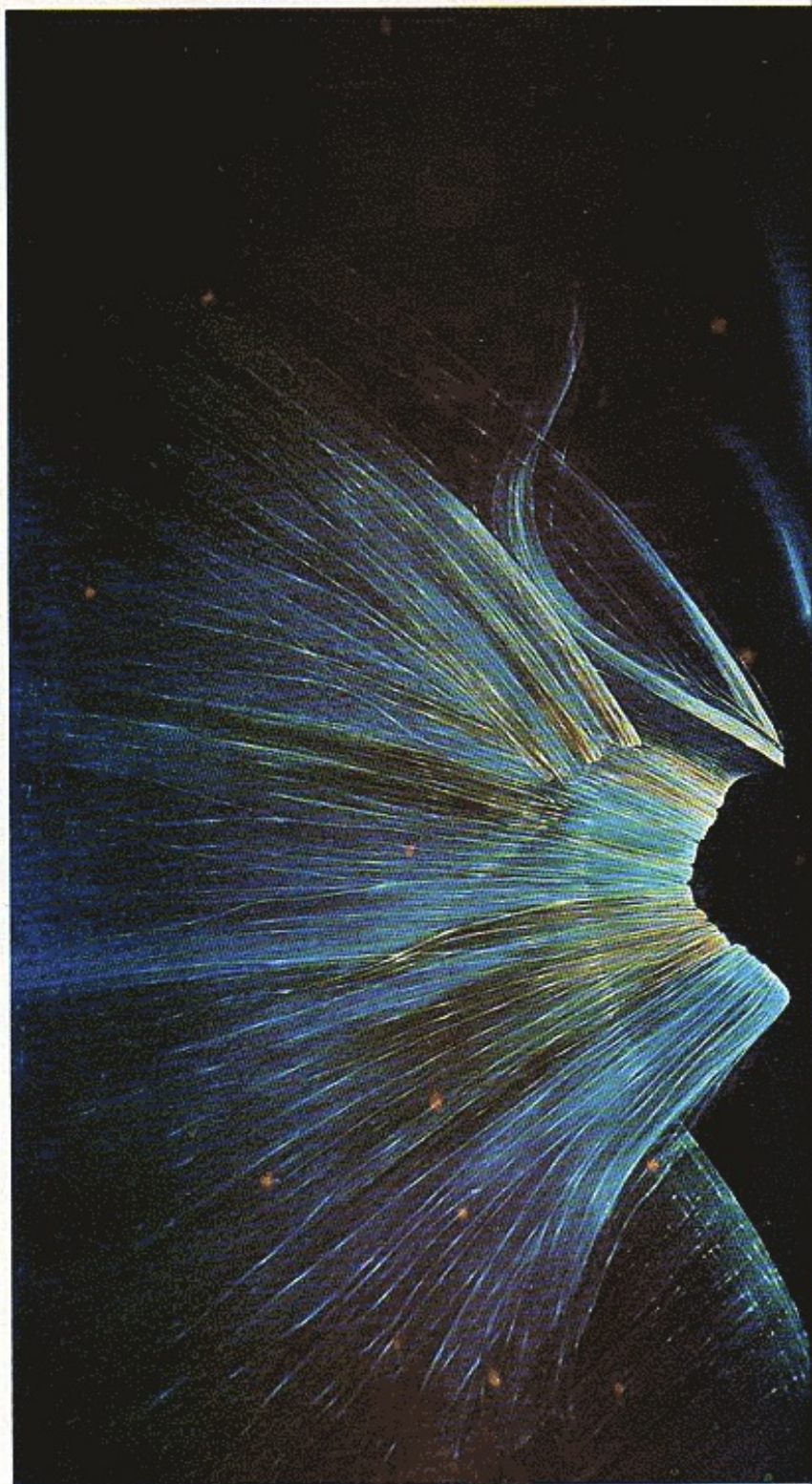




work on concepts for *Alien*. But perhaps Foss's most monumental works were executed for a film that may never be completed. In 1975 Alejandro Jodorowsky (director of *El Topo*) was commissioned to film Frank Herbert's SF classic *Dune*, and he asked Foss to design the impressive panoply of the Padishah Empire. Jodorowsky says, "Foss is a being as real and unreal as his spaceships, a medieval goldsmith of future eons, and from him are born the leather and dagger-studded machines of the Sardaukars, the pachydermatous geometry of Emperor Padishah's golden planet, the delicate butterfly plane and other machines that will one day populate all of interstellar space." ∞

Clockwise from lower right: "Catchworld"; a pilot ejects from stricken lighter ship in the design for Perry Rhodan's *The Vega Sector*; "Mission to the Stars", illustration for the cover of John Varley's 1977 epic novel *The Ophiuchi Hotline*.

●His style is influenced by J.M.W. Turner, the virtuoso painter of land, sea, and light. ●



THE SINGING DIAMOND

BY DR. ROBERT L. FORWARD

*The prospector was
searching for
valuable ores among
the asteroids.
No one expected
to find
diamonds—and fireflies!*

PAINTING BY BOB VENOSA



My asteroid was singing. Alone, but safe in my ship, I heard the multitude of voices coming through the rock. They were an angel chorus in a fluid tongue, strange but beautiful.

I followed the source of the sound, stereo headphones connected to a pair of sonar microphones buried in the crust. The voices were moving slowly through the solid stone.

They suddenly stopped, cut off in the middle of a tremulous crescendo. I took off the earphones, looked up from the sonar screen, and peered out the port at the black void around me. I could see nothing. I would have thought my ears were playing tricks on me if I had not seen the unusual fuzzy ball on the three-dimensional display of the sonar mapper.

I stopped the pinger that was sending short bursts of sound down into the asteroid I had captured and waited while the last few pulses echoed back from within the body of almost pure metallic ore. This find would bring me a fortune once I surveyed it and got it back to the processing plant.

Most rock-hoppers are content to set up the sonar mapper on a potential claim and let the computer do the job of determining whether there is enough metal in the rock to justify dragging it in. But I always liked to work along with the computer, watching the reflections on the screen and listening to the quality of the echoes. By now my ears were so well trained I could almost tell the nickel content of an inclusion by the "accent" it put on the returning sound. But this time my ears had heard something coming from the solid rock that had not been put there by the pinger.

I had the computer play back its memory, and again I heard the eerie voices, like a chorus of sirens calling me to leave my ship and penetrate into their dense home. I was sure now that the music was real, since the computer had heard it too. I replayed the data again and found that the sound had started on one side of the asteroid, traveled right through the center in a straight line, and then had gone out the other side. I had a hunch, and 90 minutes later was waiting, earphones on, when the singing started again. This time the voices started at a different position on the surface of the asteroid, but as before, they slowly traveled in a straight line, right through the exact center of the rock and out the other side. A quick session with the computer verified my hunch. Whatever was doing the singing was orbiting the asteroid, but instead of circling about it like a moon, the orbit went back and forth right through the dense nickel-iron core!

My first thought was that the weak gravity field of the asteroid had trapped a miniature black hole. The singing would be caused by stresses in the metal ore from the intense gravitational field of the moving point of warped space. But then I realized the asteroid was too tiny, only a few hundred meters across, to have captured a black hole.

The computer did more work. It determined the orbital parameters and predicted where the singers would next intersect the surface of my slowly revolving rock. I was outside, waiting at that point, when it came.

For a long time I could see nothing. Then, high above me, there was a cloud of little sun specks—falling toward me. The glittering spots in the cloud moved in rapid swirls that were too fast to follow, and the cloud seemed to pulsate, changing in size and shape. Sometimes it collapsed into an intense concentration that was almost too small to see, only to expand later into a glittering ball as big as my helmet. Inexorably, the gravity of the asteroid pulled the swarm of star-midges down toward me.

They were getting close. I tried to move back out of their path, but in my excitement I had floated upward in the weak gravity, and my magnetic boots were useless. Twisting my body around, I tried to dodge, but the cloud of light spots expanded just as it passed me. I screamed and blanked out as my right leg burst into pain. I felt as if I had stepped into a swarm of army ants.

I woke, the emergency beeper shouting in my ear. My leg ached, and my air was low. Detached, I looked down at the agony below my knee to see fine jets of vapor shooting out from hundreds of tiny holes in my boot. Fortunately, most of the holes seemed to be clogged with frozen balls of reddish stuff. My numbed brain refused to recognize the substance.

Using my hands, I dragged myself across the surface to my ship and carefully pulled my suit off. Insult was added to injury as the suit's Sani-Seal extracted a few red hairs as I peeled it off. I looked carefully

It was a diamond—with a flaw. Right in the center of the crystal was a thick sheet of highly reflecting metal. "What is that?" I asked. "The original asteroid," he replied. "All four million tons of it."

at my leg. The tiny holes had stopped bleeding, so I was in no immediate danger. I just hurt a lot.

For the next few days I let my leg heal while I listened to the music. I know that I was imagining it, but the beautiful voices now seemed to have a tinge of menace to them. The computer carefully monitored the motion of the swarm. It returned every 93 minutes, the normal time of close orbit around an asteroid with such a high density. Once, I had to move the ship to keep it away from the singing swarm as it came up out of the rock underneath.

After I could move around again, I experimented. Tracking the swarm as it went upward away from the surface, I used the mass detector on it at the top of its trajectory. The collection of nearly invisible specks weighed 80 kilos—as much as I did in my space suit!

I put a thin sheet of foil underneath the swarm as it fell and later examined the myriad tiny holes under a microscope. The aluminum had been penetrated many hundreds of times by each of the specks as they swirled about in the slowly falling cloud. Whatever they were, they were about

the size of a speck of dust. I finally counted the midges by tracing the streaks on a print made with my instacamera. There were over one thousand of them.

I was stumped. What was I going to do? No matter how valuable the asteroid was to me, I could not drag it back to the processing plant with its deadly hornet's nest swirling about it.

I thought about pushing the asteroid out from under the cloud, but my small ship was not going to move a 20-million-ton chunk of rock at anything like the acceleration needed. I would have to get rid of the stinging swarm in some way, but how do you trap something that travels through solid iron like it isn't there? Besides, it could be that the tiny star specks themselves were worth more than the ball of ore that they orbited.

I finally gave up and called for help. "Belt Traffic Control, this is 'Red' Vengeance in The Billionaire. I have a problem. Would you please patch the following message to Belt Science Authority?" I then gave a detailed description of what I had been able to learn about my tiny pests. I signed off and started lunch. It was nearly 20 light-minutes to the Belt Traffic Control station.

In two weeks a few of the small cadre of scientists who were allowed to live out in the Belt were there, cluttering up my rock with their instruments. They couldn't learn much more with their gadgets than I did with my camera and aluminum foil. The specks were tiny and very dense. No one could think of any way to trap them.

I was ready to abandon my claim and leave a fortune and its buzzing poltergeist to the scientists when I remembered the Belt Facility for Dangerous Experiments. The major activity was a high-current particle accelerator designed to produce the antihydrogen that filled the "water torch" engines used in deep space. At each refueling I would watch apprehensively as electric fields and laser beams carefully shepherded a few grams of frozen antimatter into my engine room. There, each grain annihilated would heat many tons of water into a blazing exhaust.

However, antimatter has other uses, and nearby a group made exotic materials by explosive-forming. I went to them with my problem. Soon I had a bemused entourage of high-powered brains trying to think of ways to stop my irresistible objects. We were relaxing with drink squeezers in the facetiously named BOOM! room, which overlooked the distant explosive-forming test site. I dressed for the occasion in an emerald-green bodysuit that I had chosen to match my eyes, and a diaphanous skirt that required dexterity to keep it looking properly arranged in free fall. I wore my one luxury, an uncirculated solid-gold Spanish doubloon.

While the discussions were going on, news arrived from the contingent still observing my find. The specks were still moving too fast to take close-up pictures with

the cameras available, but at least the size and density of the specks had been determined. They were dense, but not of nuclear density, only about a million times greater than the density of water.

"Our bodies are one thousand times more dense than air, and we can move through that with ease," I said. "So, at a density ratio of a million to one, my leg was like a vacuum to them! No wonder they can go through solid iron like it isn't even there!"

"Although the asteroid's iron can't stop the swarm, its gravity does hold them," said one scientist. He pulled out a card computer and started scratching with his fingernail on the pliable input-output surface. We clustered around, holding position by whatever handhold was available, and watched as his crude scratchings were replaced by a computer-generated picture of a flat disc with curved arrows pointing smoothly in toward its two faces.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Flypaper," he said, looking up at me floating above him. "Or, for your problem, Red—gnat paper."

His thick fingers scratched some more calculations, this time in pure math. I followed them without too much trouble. There were no pictures to give me any clues, but it was obvious from the symbols that he was merely applying Newton's Law of Gravity to a disc instead of to the usual sphere.

"We can make the flypaper with the explosive-forming techniques we have developed," he said, "but to keep it from decomposing, we are going to have to contain it in a pressure capsule."

The process looks deceptively simple when one looks out through the eyes of an auto-robot. You merely take a large rotating asteroid as big as an office building and hit it from all sides with a spray of antimatter. When the shock wave passes, you have a small, rapidly spinning plate of glowing decomposed matter that is trying desperately to regain its former bulk. Before it does, you hit it from 12 sides with a carefully arranged set of accurately cut chunks of nickel-iron lined with pure carbon. In the split-nanosecond that the configuration is compressed together into an elastically rebounding supersolid, you coat it heavily with another layer of antimatter and let it cool for a week.

The auto-robots brought it to us—still warm. It was a diamond—with a flaw. Right in the center of the barrel-size crystal was a thick sheet of highly reflecting metal.

"What is that?" I asked the one who had arranged the fireworks display.

"The original asteroid, Miss Vengeance," he replied. "All four million tons of it. It has been compressed into a thin disc of ultradense matter and surrounded by diamond to keep it from expanding back into normal matter. There is your flypaper; let's go use it."

The disc was 30 centimeters across and only a centimeter thick, but it took a

large space-tug to heave that ultraheavy pancake griddle into an orbit that would reach my claim and its singing hangers-on. Once it was there, it was delicate work getting the sluggish plate placed in the path of the glittering cloud that still bounced back and forth through my property every 93 minutes. Finally the task was accomplished. Passing slowly through the diamond casing as if it were not there, the scintillating sparks floated upward toward the metal disc—and stuck.

"They stopped!" I shouted in amazement.

"Of course," said a metallic voice over my suit speaker. "They ran into something that was denser than they are, and its gravitational field is strong enough to hold them on its surface."

"Something that dense must be a billion g's," I said.

"I wish it were," said the voice. "I would have liked to have made the gravity stronger so I could be sure we would hold

“The gravity of the asteroid pulled the star-midges toward me. I tried to move out of their path . . . but the cloud of light spots expanded just as it passed me. I screamed and blanked out.”

on to the specks once we had stopped them. With the limited facilities we have at the test site, the most matter we can compress at one time is four million tons. That disc has a gravitational field of only one g on each side."

After watching for a while, I saw that the tiny specks were not going to be able to leave the surface of their flat-world prison. I conquered my fear and let my helmet rest against the outside of the diamond casing that encapsulated the shiny disc and its prisoners.

The diamond was singing.

The voices I remembered were there, but they were different from the wild, free-swirling chorus that still haunted me from our first meeting. The singing now seemed constrained and flat.

I laughed at my subconscious double pun and pulled back to let the scientists have their prize. They hauled the crystalline cask away with the space tug, and I returned to the difficult months-long task of getting my asteroid back to the processing station.

I made a fortune. Even my trained ear

had underestimated the nickel content. When payoff time came, I knew that from then on every expedition I made out into the belt was for fun and gravy, for all the money I would ever need for a decent retirement nest egg was in solid credits in the Bank of Outer Belt.

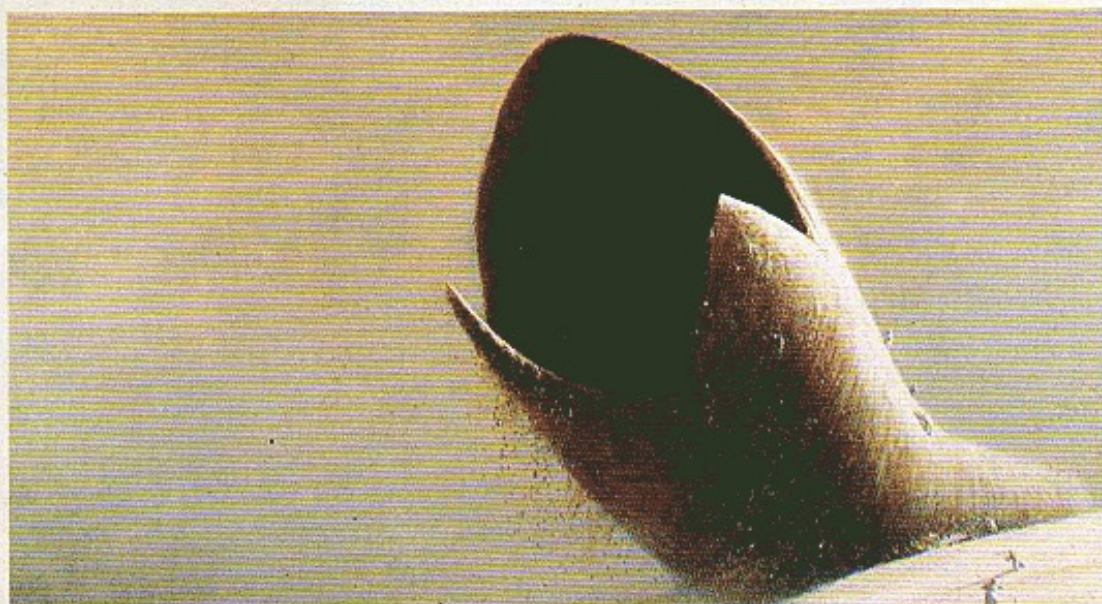
With no more financial worries, I began to take an interest in my little beasties—for that is what they were. The high-speed cameras had been able to determine that their complex motion was not due to random natural laws but was caused by the deliberate motion of each of the spots with respect to the others. A few frames had even shown some of the tiny specks in the process of emitting a little jet of gamma-ray exhaust in order to change its course to meet with another speck for a fraction of a microsecond. Then, many revolutions and many milliseconds later, each of the two specks that had previously met would release another tiny speck, which joined the great swarm in its seemingly random motion.

The most significant frame from the high-speed cameras, however, is the one that I have blown up into a holopicture over the head of my bunk. I didn't think that you could create a decent three-dimensional likeness of someone using only 1000 points of light, but it is me, all right. Everyone recognizes it instantly—aristocratic nose, bobbed hair, helmet, mike, freckles, and all the rest.

But that is all the beasties have ever done in the way of communication. For years the scientists have tried to get some other response from them, but the specks just ignore their efforts. I guess that when you live a trillion times faster than someone else, even a short dialogue seems to drag on forever and just isn't worth the effort. The scientists even took the diamond down to Earth and tried to build a superfast robot as a translator. Now, after years of examination and fruitless attempts to communicate, we finally were able to place the diamond in the San-San Zoo.

The specks, which used to be plastered to one side of the dense disc, are free now that they are on Earth. The one-g upward pull of the underside of the disc is exactly canceled by the one-g downward pull of the Earth. The specks seem to be perfectly happy. They could easily leave the gravity-free region under the disc, but they don't seem to want to. Their cloud stays a compact sphere just below their antigravity ceiling. They continue with their complex intermingling, swirling behavior, passing easily through the ultrahard diamond that holds up their four-million-ton roof.

When I was a young girl at Space Polytech, I dreamed that when I got rich I would spend my latter years reveling in the vacation spots around the world and throughout the solar system, but now I don't want to. Sometimes I can stand it for a whole month—but then I just have to go back and hear my diamond sing. ☐





DUNE

Here the moon is your friend, the sun your enemy

BY FRANK HERBERT

Arrakis — Dune — Desert Planet. A wasteland where nothing lives except the spice and sandworms . . . Arrakis has special problems. . . . Storms build up across six or seven thousand kilometers of flatlands . . . blow up to seven hundred kilometers an hour . . . the pressures of thirst all around you. . . . Shelter means a hollow-out of the wind and hidden from view. . . . The spice . . . is unique . . . it cannot be made . . . it must be mined on Arrakis.

PAINTINGS BY JOHN SCHOENHERR



●A basso voice rumbled. "The biggest mantrap in history. Is it not a great thing that I, the Baron, do?"

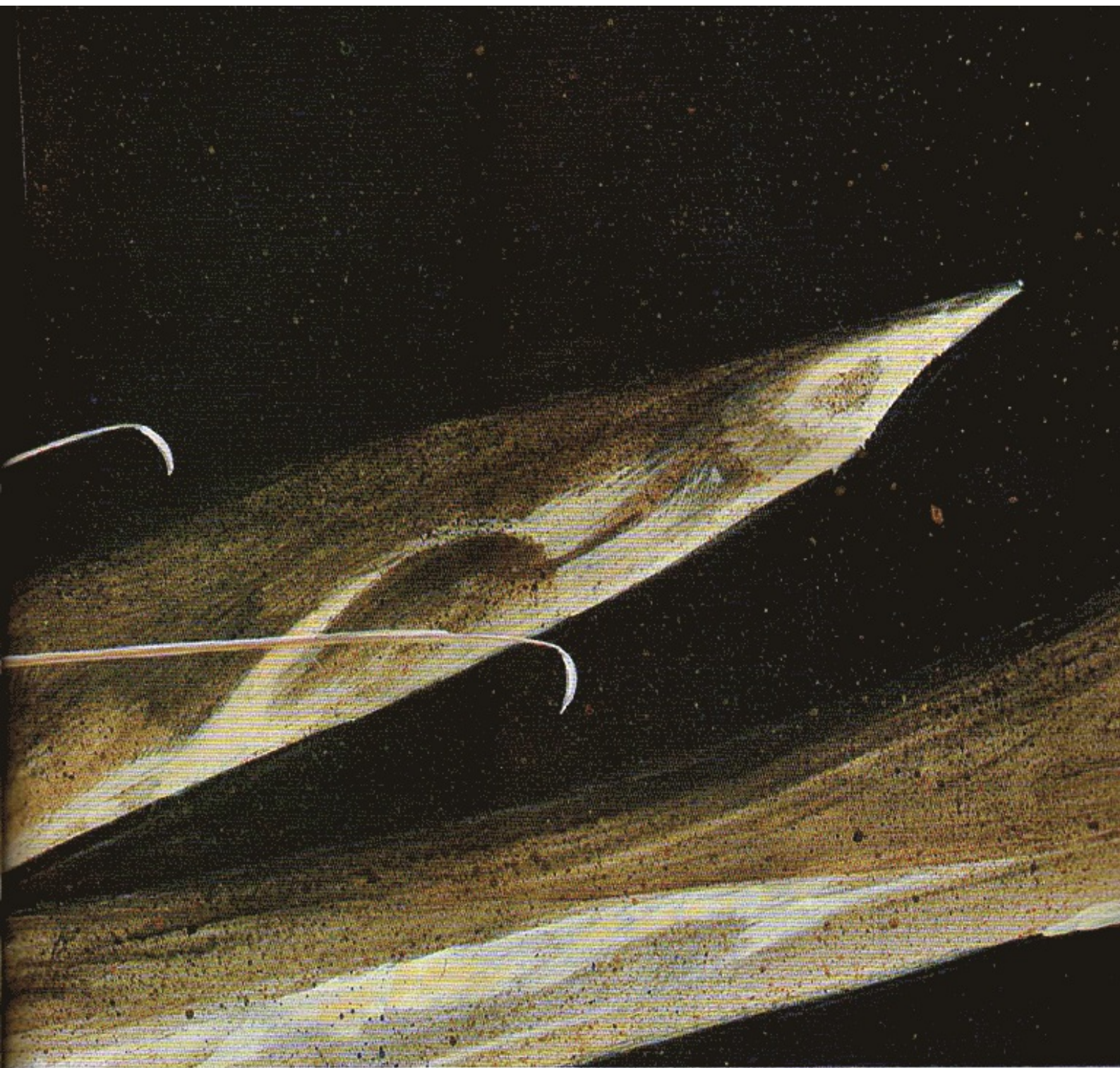


The Sardaukar ... soldier fanatics ... tough, strong, ferocious men ... from the Emperor's prison planet. Sardaukar do not submit ... they carry coils of shigawire in their hair ... strong enough to garrote a man. Top: The Baron was grossly and immensely fat. ... All the fat was sustained by portable suspensors harnessed to his flesh ... his feet wouldn't carry more than fifty ... of his two hundred kilos. Above: The name, Arrakeen, had a good sound, filled with tradition. The arched ceilings stood two stories ... with great crossbeams shipped ... across space at huge cost. ... And this was a smaller city, easier ... to defend.



Across the sand, a giant worm—a maker—would hear and come to the thumper's drumming. When it came from the southeast . . . Paul realized he had never seen a maker this large . . . he waited on the sand outside its line of approach. . . . The wild maker . . . loomed almost on him . . . the wave lifted his feet . . . he steadied himself . . . lifted his hooks, sighted along them, leaned in. He felt them bite and pull. . . . Paul found himself riding upright atop the worm. He felt exultant, like an emperor surveying his world. . . . He spoke to Stilgar. "Then, I am a sandrider, Stil?" "You are a sandrider this day," replied Stilgar. *Right:* A roll of ball lightning bounced away from the wall. . . . "The shield . . . is down!" . . . 'thopters dived out of the night . . . in a hissing wedge. . . . And it was to the Arrakeen governor's mansion, the old Residency . . . that they escorted Paul Muad'Dib on the evening of his victory.

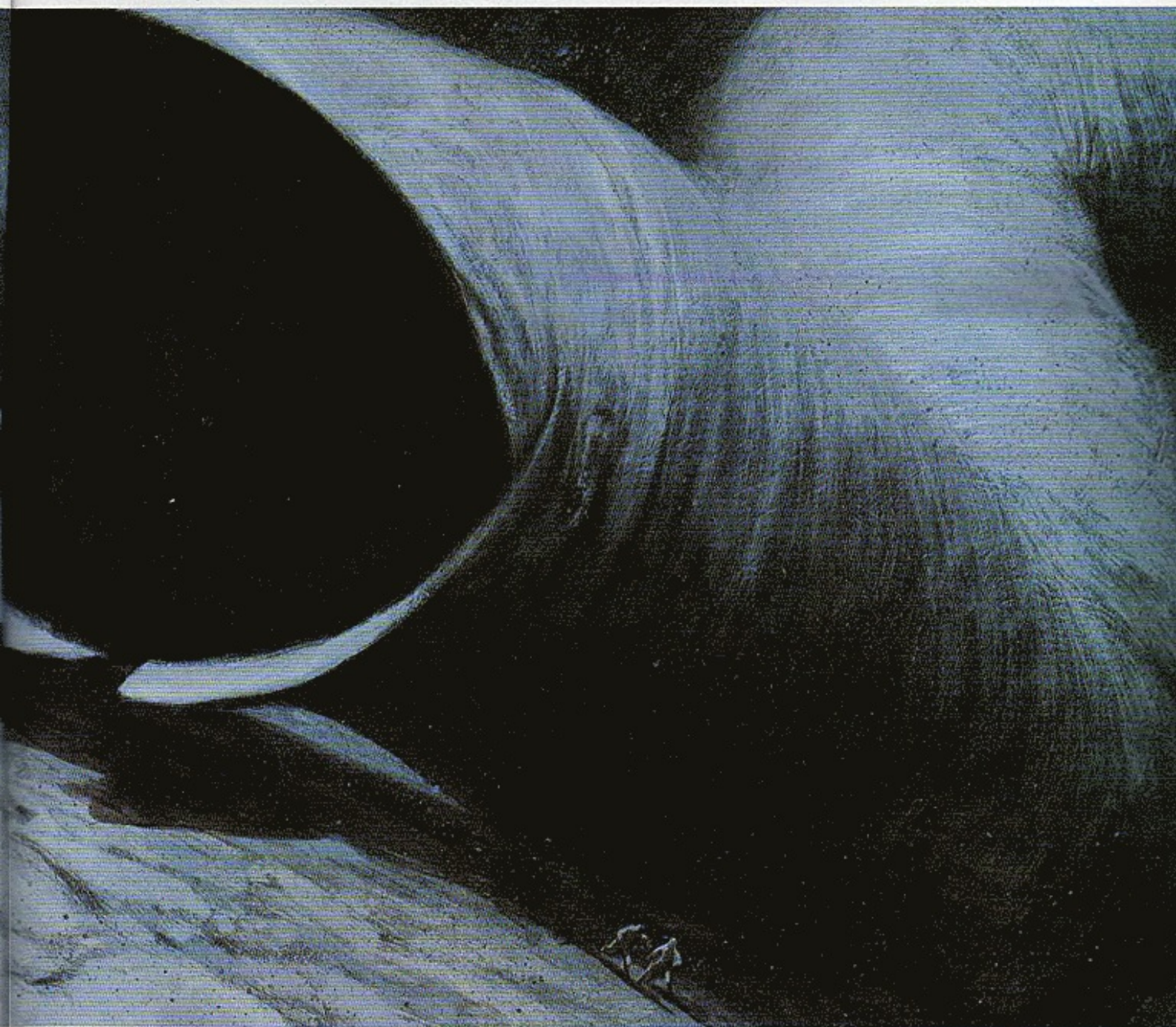
“All you must do is call the maker and ride him. Go, so you may travel the sand as a leader of men.”



“Out of the haze came sandworms,
a massed wall of them, each with troops of
Fremen riding to the attack.”



A silver-gray curve broached from the desert, sending rivers of sand and dust cascading all around. It lifted higher, resolved into a giant questing mouth . . . some eighty meters in diameter . . . crystal teeth with the curved shape of crysknives glinting around the rim . . . the bellows breath of cinnamon, subtle aldehydes . . . acids. Above: A tall man in a mottled burnoose stepped in front of Jessica. His mouth baffle was thrown aside for clear speech, revealing a heavy beard . . . but face and eyes . . . hidden in the overhang of his hood. "If you're fugitives from Harkonnens," he said, "you're welcome with us. I am Stilgär, the Fremen." ∞





*Could all those ancient legends be true?
Was a vampire stalking her?*

The Ancient Mind at Work

BY SUZY MCKEE CHARNAS

On a Tuesday morning Katje discovered that Dr. Weyland was a vampire, like the one in the movie she'd seen last week.

Jackson's friend on the night cleaning crew had left his umbrella hooked over the bike rack outside the lab building. Since Katje liked to take a stroll in the dawn quiet before starting work, she went over to see if the umbrella was still there. As she started back empty-handed through the heavy mist, she heard the door of the lab building boom behind her, and she looked back.

Two men had come out.

One of them, clearly hurt or ill, sank down on his knees and reached out a hand to steady himself on the damp and glistening surface of the parking lot. The other, a tall man with gray hair, turned his head to look full at the kneeling figure—and continued walking without hesitation. He didn't even take his hands out of his raincoat pockets until he stooped to unlock his shimmering, dark Mercedes. He got inside and drove off.

Katje started back toward the lot. But the young man pushed himself upright, looked around in a bewildered

manner, and making his way unsteadily to his own car also drove away.

So, there was the vampire, sated and cruel, and there was his victim, wilted, pale, and confused—although the movie vampire had swirled about in a black cloak, not a trench coat, and had gone after bosomy young females. Walking over the lawn to the club, Katje smiled at her own fancy.

What she had really seen, she knew, was the star of the Cayslin Center for the Study of Man, Dr. Weyland, leaving the lab with one of his sleep-subjects after a

debilitating all-night session. Dr. Weyland must have thought the young man was stooping to retrieve dropped car keys.

The Cayslin Club was an old mansion donated years before to the college. It served now as the faculty club. Its grandeur had been severely challenged by the lab building and attendant parking lot constructed on half of the once spacious lawn, but the club was still imposing within.

This morning when she stepped inside, Katje found a woman in a T-shirt, shorts, and red shoes running from the

PAINTING BY H. R. GIGER

dining area through the hall and down the length of the living room, making a turn of quick little steps at the fireplace, and running back again. It was Miss Donnelly's latest guest lecturer, who was surely old enough to have more dignity. Nothing could hurt the synthetic carpeting that had replaced the fine old rugs, but really, what a way for a grown woman to behave!

She glared. The runner waved cheerfully. Jackson was in the green room, plugging leaks; it had begun to rain now. The green room was a glassed-in terrace, tile-floored and furnished with chairs of lacy wrought iron.

"Did you find it, Mrs. de Groot?" Jackson asked.

"No, I'm sorry." Katje never called him by his name because she didn't know whether he was Jackson Somebody or Somebody Jackson, and she had learned to be careful about everything to do with blacks in this country.

"Thanks for looking, anyway," Jackson said.

In the kitchen she stood by the sinks, staring out at the dreary day. She had never grown used to these chill, watery winters, though after so many years she couldn't quite recall the exact quality of the African sunlight in which she had grown up. It was no great wonder that Henrik had died here. The gray climate had finally quenched even his ardent nature six years ago.

Her savings from her own salary as housekeeper at the Cayslin Club would eventually finance her return home. She needed enough to buy not a farm but a house with a garden patch somewhere high and cool. She frowned, trying to picture the ideal site, but nothing clear came into her mind. She had been away so long.

While Katje was scrubbing out the sinks, Miss Donnelly burst in, shrugging off her dripping coat. "Of all the high-handed, Goddamn—oh, hello, Mrs. de Groot; sorry for the language. Look, we won't be having the women's faculty lunch here tomorrow after all. Dr. Weyland is giving a special money pitch to a couple of fat-cat alumni, and he wants a nice, quiet setting—our lunch corner here at the club, as it turns out. Dean Wacker's already said yes, so that's that." She cocked her head to one side. "What in the world is that thumping noise?"

"Someone running," Katje said, thinking abstractedly of the alumni lunching with the vampire. Would he eat? The one in the movie hadn't.

Miss Donnelly's face got red patches over the sharp cheekbones. "My God, is that my lecturer doing her jogging in here because of the weather? I'm so sorry, Mrs. de Groot—I did mean to find her someplace to run, but even in free periods the gyms are full of great hulking boys playing basketball—"

She smiled. "You know, Mrs. de Groot, I've been meaning to ask you to be my next guest lecturer. Would you come talk to my students?"

"Me? What about?"

"Oh, about colonial Africa, what it was like growing up there. These kids' experience is so narrow and protected, I look for every chance to expand their thinking."

Katje wrung out the rag. "My grandfather and Uncle Jan whipped the native boys to work like cattle and kicked them hard enough to break bones for not showing respect. Otherwise we would have been overrun and driven out. I used to go hunting. I shot rhino, elephant, leopard, and I was proud of doing it and doing it well. Your students don't want to know about such things. They have nothing to fear but tax collectors and nothing to do with nature except giving money for whales and seals."

"But that's what I mean," Miss Donnelly said. "Different viewpoints."

"There are plenty of books about Africa."

"Okay, forget I asked." Miss Donnelly gnawed at her thumbnail, frowning. "I guess I could get the women together over at Corrigan tomorrow instead of here if I spend an hour on the phone. We'll miss

*"Dream mapping," they call it.
Maurice says there's
nothing interesting in his lab . . .
recording machines and
computers and like that. . .
Only you won't catch me laying
out my dreams on tape!"*

your cooking, Mrs. de Groot."

Katje said, "Will Dr. Weyland expect me to cook for his guests?"

"Not Weyland," Miss Donnelly said drily. "It's nothing but the best for him, which means the most expensive. They'll probably have a banquet brought in from Borchard's."

She went to collect her guest.

Katje put on coffee and phoned Buildings and Grounds. Yes, Dr. Weyland and two companions were on at the club for tomorrow; no, Mrs. de Groot wouldn't have to do anything but tidy up afterward; yes, it was short notice, and please write it in on the club calendar; and yes, Jackson had been told to check the eaves over the east bedrooms before he left.

"Wandering raincoat," Miss Donnelly said, darting in to snatch it up from the chair where she'd left it. "Just watch out for Weyland, Mrs. de Groot."

"What, an old woman of fifty, more gray than blond, with lines and bones in the face? I am not some slinky graduate student trying not only for an A but for the professor also."

"I don't mean romance," Miss Donnelly

grinned. "though God knows half the faculty—of both sexes—are in love with the man." Honestly, Katje thought, the things people talked about these days! "To no avail, alas, since he's a real loner. But he will try to get you into his expensive sleep lab and make your dreams part of the world-shaking, history-changing research that he stole off poor old Joel Milnes."

Milnes, Katje thought when she was alone again: Professor Milnes, who had gone away to some sunny place to die of cancer. Then Dr. Weyland had come from a small southern school and taken over Milnes's dream project, saving it from being junked—or stealing it, in Miss Donnelly's version. A person who looked at a thing in too many ways was bound to get confused.

Jackson came in and poured coffee for himself. He leaned back in his chair and flipped the schedules where they hung on the wall by the phone. He was as slender as a Kikuyu youth—she could see his ribs arch under his shirt. He ate a lot of starch and junk food, but he was too nervous to fatten on it. By rights he belonged in a red blanket, skin gleaming with oil, hair plaited. This life pulled him out of his nature.

"Try and don't put nobody in that number-six bedroom till I get to it the end of the week," he said. "The rain drips in behind the casement. I laid out towels to soak up the water. I see you got Weyland in here tomorrow. My buddy Maurice on the cleaning crew says that guy got the best lab in the place."

"What is Dr. Weyland's research?" Katje asked.

"Dream mapping," they call it. Maurice says there's nothing interesting in his lab—just equipment, you know, recording machines and computers and like that. I'd like to see all that hardware sometime. Only you won't catch me laying out my dreams on tape!

"Well, I got to push along. There's some dripping faucets over at Joffey I got to look at. Hans Brinker, that's me. Thanks for the coffee."

Katje began pulling out the fridge racks for cleaning, listening to him whistle as he gathered up his tools in the green room.

The people from Borchard's left her very little to do. She was stacking the rinsed dishes in the washer when a man said from the doorway, "I am very obliged to you, Mrs. de Groot."

Dr. Weyland stood poised there, slightly stoop-shouldered, head thrust inquisitively forward as he examined the kitchen. She was surprised that he knew her name, for he did not frequent the club. She had seen his tall figure only once or twice in the dining room.

"There was just a bit remaining to do, Dr. Weyland," she said.

"Still, this is your territory," he said, advancing. "I'm sure you were helpful to the Borchard's people. I've never been back here. Are those freezers or refrigerators?"

She showed him around the kitchen and the pantries. He seemed impressed. He was, she realized, unexpectedly personable: lean and grizzled, but with the hint of vulnerability common among rangy men. You couldn't look at him without imagining the gawky scarecrow he must have been as a boy. His striking features—craggy nose and brow, strong mouth, lank jaw—no doubt outsize and homely then, were now impressively united by the long creases of experience on his cheeks and forehead.

"No more scullions cranking the spit," he remarked over the rotisserie. "You come originally from East Africa, Mrs. de Groot? Things must have been very different there."

"Yes. I left a long time ago."

"Surely not so very long," he said, and his eyes flicked over her from head to foot.

Relaxing in the warmth of his interest she said, "Are you from elsewhere also?"

A mistake; he frosted up at once. "Why do you ask?"

"Excuse me. I thought I heard just the trace of an accent."

"My family were Europeans. We spoke German at home. May I sit down?" His big hands, capable- and strong-looking, graced the back of a chair. He smiled briefly. "Would you mind sharing your coffee with an institutional fortune hunter? That is my job—persuading rich men and the guardians of foundations to spend a little of their money in support of work that offers no immediate result. I don't enjoy dealing with these shortsighted men."

"Everyone says you do it well," Katje filled a cup for him.

"It takes up my time," he said. "It wearies me." His large and brilliant eyes, in sockets darkened with fatigue, had a withdrawn, somber aspect. How old was he? Katje wondered.

Suddenly he gazed at her and said, "Didn't I see you over by the lab the other morning? There was mist on my windshield; I couldn't be sure."

She told him about Jackson's friend's umbrella, thinking now he'll explain, this is what he came to say. But he added nothing, and she found herself hesitant to ask about the student in the parking lot. "Is there anything else I can do for you, Dr. Weyland?"

"I don't mean to keep you from your work. One thing. Would you come over and do a session for me in the sleep lab?"

She shook her head.

"All the information goes on tapes under coded I.D. numbers, Mrs. de Groot. Your privacy would be strictly guarded."

"I would prefer not to."

"Excuse me then. It was a pleasure to talk with you," he said, rising. "If you find a reason to change your mind, my extension is one sixty-three."

She was close to tears, but Uncle Jan made her strip down the gun again—her first gun, her own gun—and then the lion coughed, and she saw with the wide gaze of fear his golden form crouched, tail lash-

ing, in the thornbush. As her pony shied she threw up her gun and fired, and the dust boiled up from the thrashings of the wounded cat.

Then Scotty's patient voice said, "Do it again," and she was tearing down the rifle once more by lamplight at the worn wooden table while her mother sewed with angry stabs of the needle and spoke words Katje didn't bother hearing because she knew the gist by heart: "If only Jan had children of his own! Sons, preferably, to take out hunting with Scotty. Because he has no sons, he takes Katje out shooting instead so he can show how tough Boer youngsters are, even a girl. For whites to kill for sport, as Jan and Scotty do, is to go backward into the barbaric past of Africa. Now the farm is producing; there is no need to kill for hides to get cash for coffee, salt, and tobacco. And to train a girl to go stalking and killing animals like scarcely more than an animal herself!"

"Again," said Scotty, and the lion coughed, making the pony shiver under her; Katje woke.

She was sitting in front of the tv, blinking at the sharp, knowing face of the talk-show host. The sound had gone off again, and she had dozed.

She didn't often dream, hardly ever of Africa. Why now? Because, she thought, Dr. Weyland had roused her memory. She thought he looked a bit like Scotty, the neighboring farmer whom Uncle Jan had

begun by calling a damned *rooinek* and ended treating like a brother.

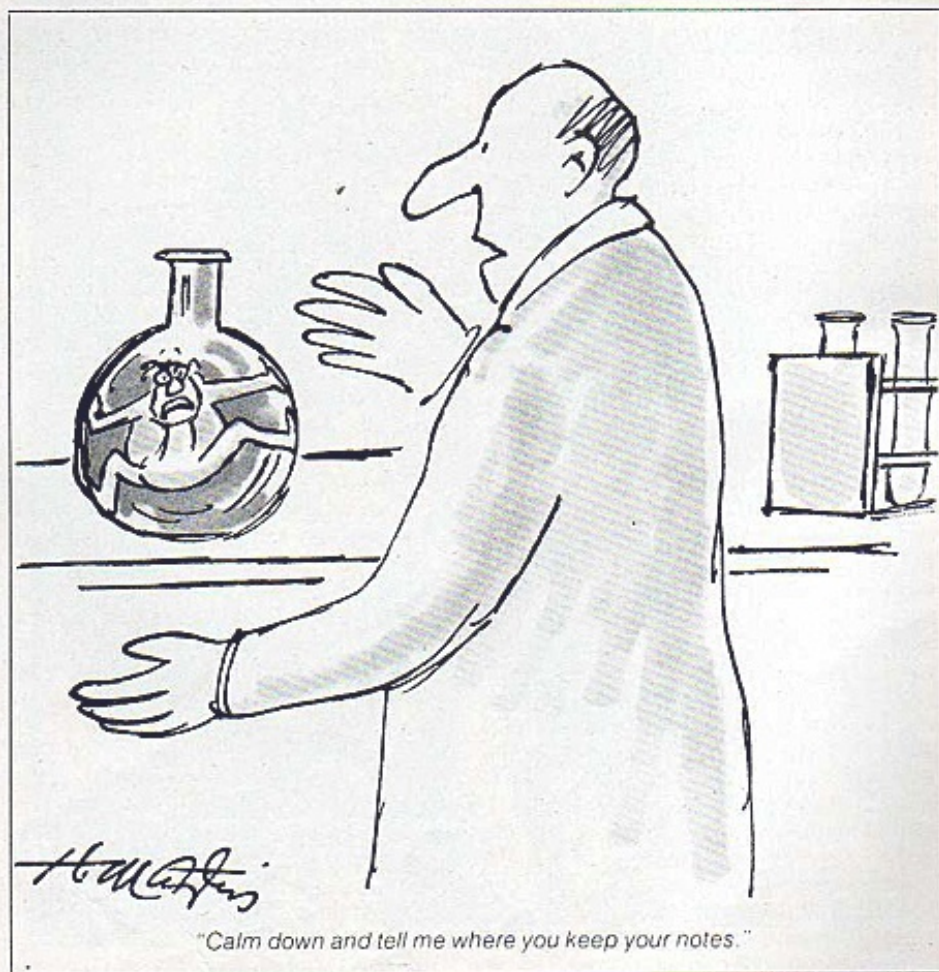
She got up and hit the tv to make it speak again and sat down to watch with an apple in her hand. Lately she ate too much, out of boredom. Would she grow stout like her mother? It was Dr. Weyland who had brought this worry to the surface of her mind, no proper concern of a middle-aged widow. It was Dr. Weyland who had stirred up that long-ago girlhood spent prowling for game in the bright, dissolving landscape of tan grass.

"Under the bed, do you think?" Miss Donnelly dropped on her knees to look. The guest lecturer had left her hairbrush behind. Katje forbore to point out that this was the sort of thing to be expected of someone who put on track clothes and ran inside.

A student flung open the bedroom door and leaned in: "Is it too late to hand in my paper, Miss Donnelly?"

"For God's sake, Mickey," Miss Donnelly burst out, "where did you get that?"

Across the chest of the girl's T-shirt where her coat gapped open were emblazoned the words SLEEP WITH WEYLAND. HE'S A DREAM. She grinned. "Some hustler is selling them right outside the co-op. Better hurry if you want one—Security's already been sent for." She giggled, put a sheaf of dog-eared pages down on the chair by the door, added "Thanks, Miss Donnelly," and clattered away down the stairs.



Miss Donnelly sat back on her heels and laughed. "Well, I never, as my grandma used to say. That man is turning this school into a circus!"

"These young people have no respect for anything," Katje said. "What will Dr. Weyland say, seeing his name used like that? He should have her expelled."

"Him? He'll barely notice. But Wacker will throw fits." Miss Donnelly got up, dusting her hands. She ran a finger over the blistered paint on the windowsill. "Pity they can't use some of the loot Weyland brings in to really fix this old place up. But I guess we can't complain. Without Weyland this would be just another expensive little backwater school for the not so bright children of the upper middle class. And it isn't all roses even for him; this T-shirt thing will bring on a fresh bout of backbiting among his colleagues, you watch. This kind of incident brings out the jungle beast in even the mildest academics."

Katje snorted. She didn't think much of academic infighting.

"I know we must seem pretty tame to you," Miss Donnelly said wryly, "but there are some real ambushes and even killings here, in terms of careers. It's not the cushy life it sometimes seems, and not so secure either."

"Even you may be in a little trouble, Mrs. de Groot, though I hope not. Only a few weeks ago there was a complaint from a faculty member that you upset his guests by something you said—"

"I said they couldn't set up a dart board in here," Katje responded crisply.

"There are others who don't like your politics—"

"I never speak about politics," Katje said, offended. That was the first thing Henrik had demanded of her here. She had acquiesced like a good wife; not that she was ashamed of her political beliefs. She had loved and married Henrik not because but in spite of his radical politics.

"From your silence they assume you're some kind of reactionary racist," Miss Donnelly said. "And because you're a Boer and don't carry on your husband's crusade. Then there are the ones who say you're just too old and stuffy for the job, meaning you scare them a little, and they'd rather have a giggly cocktail waitress or a downtrodden mouse of a working student. But you've got plenty of partisans too, and even Wacker knows you give this place tone and dignity. They ought to double your salary. You're solid and dependable, even if you are a little, well, old-fashioned. And you lived a real life in the world, whatever your values, which is more than most of our faculty has ever done." She stopped, blushing, and moved toward the door. "Well, when that hairbrush turns up just put it aside for me, will you? Thank you, Mrs. de Groot."

Katje said, "Thank you, too." That girl was as softheaded as everyone around here, but she had a good heart.

Many of the staff had already left for va-

cation during intersession, now that new scheduling had freed everyone from doing special intensive courses between semesters. The last cocktail hour at the club was thinly attended. Katje moved among the drinkers, gathering loaded ashtrays, used glasses, crumpled napkins. A few people greeted her as she passed.

There were two major topics of conversation: the bio student who had been raped last night as she left the library, and the Weyland T-shirt or, rather, Weyland himself.

They said he was a disgrace, encouraging commercial exploitation of his name. He was probably getting a cut of the profits; no he wasn't, didn't need to, he was a superstar with plenty of income, no dependents, and no tastes except for study and work. And that beautiful Mercedes-Benz of his, don't forget. No doubt that was where he was this evening—not off on a holiday or drinking cheap club booze but tearing around the countryside in his beloved car.

Better a ride in the country than burying himself in the library and feeding his insatiable appetite for books. But what can a workaholic do if he's also an insomniac? The two conditions reinforce each other. It was unhealthy for him to push so hard. Just look at him, so haggard and preoccupied, so lean and lonely-looking. The man deserved a prize for his shy-bachelor-hopelessly-hooked-on-the-pursuit-of-knowledge act.

How many students were in the sleep project now? More than were in his classes. They called his course in ethnography "The Ancient Mind at Work," but the girls found his formality charming, and his absent-mindedness, too—did you hear how he wore two vests one on top of the other to class and never knew it? He wasn't formal; he was rigid and too old-fashioned in his thinking to make a first-rate contribution to anthropology. So he'd simply appropriated poor Milnes's beautiful adaptation of the Richman-Steinmole recording system to the documentation of dreams, throwing in some "cross-cultural" terminology to bring the project into his own field. And there was doubt that Weyland fully understood the computer end of the process. No wonder he couldn't keep an assistant for long.

Here was Petersen leaving him because of some brouhaha over a computer run. Charming, yes, but Weyland could also be a sarcastic bastard. He was apt to be testy, yes; the great are often quarrelsome, nothing new in that. Remember how he almost came to blows with young Denton over that scratch Denton put on the Mercedes' fender? When Denton lost his temper and threw a punch, Weyland jumped into the car and tried to run him down. Well, that's how Denton told it, but was it likely, considering that Weyland was big enough to flatten Denton with a slap? Denton should have been given a medal for trying to get Weyland off the street. Have you seen him drive? Roars along just barely in control of that great big machine—

Weyland himself wasn't there. Of course

not. Weyland was a disdainful, snobbish son-of-a-bitch; Weyland was a shy, socially maladroit scholar absorbed in his great work; Weyland had a secret sorrow too painful to share; Weyland was a charlatan; Weyland was a genius working himself to death to keep alive the Cayslin Center for the Study of Man.

Dean Wacker brooded by the huge, empty fireplace and said several times in a carrying voice that he had talked with Weyland and that the students involved in the T-shirt scandal would face firm disciplinary action.

Miss Donnelly came in late with a woman from Economics. They talked heatedly in the window bay, and the two other women in the room drifted over to join them. Katje followed.

"... from off-campus, but that's what they always say," one of them snapped. Miss Donnelly caught Katje's eye, smiled a strained smile, and plunged back into the discussion. They were talking about the rape. Katje wasn't interested. A woman who used her sense and carried herself with self-respect didn't get raped, but saying so to these intellectual women wasted breath. They didn't understand real life. Katje headed back toward the kitchen.

Buildings and Grounds had sent Nettie Ledyard over from the student cafeteria to help out. She was rinsing glasses and squinting at them through the smoke of her cigarette. She wore a T-shirt bearing a bulbous fish shape across the front and the words *SAVE OUR WHALES*. These "environmental" messages vexed Katje; only naive, citified people could think of wild animals as pets. The shirt undoubtedly belonged to one of Nettie's long-haired, bleeding-heart boyfriends. Nettie herself smoked too much to pretend to an environmental conscience. She was no hypocrite, at least. But she should come properly dressed to do a job at the club, just in case a professor came wandering back here for more ice or whatever.

"I'll be helping you with the club inventory again during intersession," Nettie said. "Good thing too. You'll be spending a lot of time over here until school starts again, and the campus is really emptying out. Now there's this sex maniac cruising around—though what I could do but run like hell and scream my head off I can't tell you."

"Listen, what's this about Jackson sending you on errands for him?" she added irritably. She flicked ash off her bosom, which was high like a shelf, pushed up by her too tight brassiere. "His pal Maurice can pick up his own umbrella; he's no cripple. Having you wandering around out there alone at some godforsaken hour—"

"Neither of us knew about the rapist," Katje said, wiping out the last of the ashtrays.

"Just don't let Jackson take advantage of you, that's all."

Katje grunted. She had been raised not to let herself be taken advantage of by blacks. At home they practiced that art.

Later, helping to dig out a fur hat from under the pile of coats in the foyer, Katje heard someone saying, "... other people's work, glomming on and taking all the credit; a real bloodsucker."

Into her mind came the image of Dr. Weyland's tall figure moving without a break in stride past the stricken student.

Jackson came down from the roof with watering eyes. A damp wind was rising.

"That leak is fixed for a while," he said, hunching to blow on his chapped hands. "But the big shots at Buildings and Grounds got to do something better before the next snow piles up and soaks through again."

Katje polished the silver plate with a gray flannel. "What do you know about vampires?" she said.

"How bad you want to know?"

He had no right to joke with her like that, he whose ancestors had been heathen savages. "What do you know about vampires?" she repeated firmly.

"Not a thing." He grinned. "But you just keep on going to the movies with Nettie, and you'll find out all about that kind of stuff. She got to have the dumbest taste in movies there ever was. Horrible stuff!"

Katje looked down from the landing at Nettie, who had just let herself in to the club. Nettie's hair was all in tight little rings like pigs' tails. She called, "Guess what I went and did?"

"Your hair," Katje said. "You got it done curly."

Nettie hung her coat crookedly on the rack and peered into the foyer mirror. "I've been wanting to try a permanent for months, but I couldn't find the money. So the other night I went over to the sleep lab." She came upstairs.

"What was it like?" Katje said, looking more closely at Nettie's face: Was she paler than usual? Yes, Katje thought with sudden apprehension.

"It's nothing much. You just lie down on this couch, and they plug you in to their machines, and you sleep. Next morning you unplug and go collect your pay. That's all there is to it."

"You slept well?"

"I felt pretty dragged out yesterday. Dr. Weyland gave me a list of stuff I'm supposed to eat to fix that, and he got me the day off too. Wait a minute, I need a smoke before we go into the linens."

They stood together on the upper landing. From down in the living room rose the murmur of quiet conversation.

Nettie said, "I'd go back for another sleep session in a minute if they'd have me. Good money for no work; not like this." She blew a stream of smoke contemptuously toward the closet door.

Katje said, "Someone has to do what we do."

"Yeah, but why us?" Nettie lowered her voice. "We ought to get old Grauer and Rhine in there with the bedding and the inventory lists, and us two go sit in their big

leather chairs and drink coffee like ladies."

Katje had already done that as Henrik's wife. What she wanted now was to sit on the stoep after a day's hunting, sipping drinks and trading stories of the kill in the pungent dusk, away from the smoky, noisy hole of a kitchen: a life that Henrik had rebelled against as parasitical, narrow, and dull. His grandfather, like Katje's, had trekked right out of the Transvaal when it became too staid for him and had started over, and what was wrong with that kind of courage and strength? Henrik had carried on the tradition. He had the guts to fight Uncle Jan and everybody else over the future of the land, the government, the natives—that courage had drawn her to him, and had lost her that fine old life and landed her here, now.

Nettie, still hanging back from the linen closet, grudgingly ground out her cigarette on the sole of her shoe. "Coming to the meeting Friday?"

"No. I told you, they're all Reds in those unions. I do all right for myself." Besides, Dr. Weyland was giving a lecture that same Friday night. Katje opened the closet.

"Okay; if you think it's fine to make what we make doing this stuff. Me, I'm glad there's something like a gig in the sleep lab now and then so I can make a little extra and live like a person once in a while. You ought to go over there, you know? There's hardly anything doing during intercession with almost everybody gone. They could

take you right away. You get extra pay and time off, and besides, Dr. Weyland's kind of cute, in a gloomy, old sort of a way. He leaned over me to plug something into the wall, and I said, 'Go ahead, you can bite my neck any time.'"

Katje gave her a startled glance, but Nettie, not noticing, moved past her into the closet and pulled out the step stool. Katje said in a neutral voice, "What did he say to that?"

"Nothing, but he smiled." Nettie climbed onto the step stool. "We'll start up top, all right? I bet all the guys who work nights at the labs get those kind of jokes all the time. Later he said he was hoping you'd come by, and I said he just likes his blood in different flavors."

Taking a deep breath of the sweet sunshine smell of the clean linens, Katje said, "He asked you to ask me to come?"

"He said to remind you."

The first pile of blankets was handed down from the top shelf. Katje said, "He really accepts anyone into this project?"

"Unless you're sick, or if you've got a funny metabolism or whatever. They do a blood test on you, like at the doctor's."

That was when Katje noticed the little round Band-Aid on the inside of Nettie's elbow, right over the vein.

Miss Donnelly was sharing a jug of cheap wine with three other faculty women in the front lounge. Katje made sure the coffee machine was filled for them and then



slipped outside.

She still walked alone on campus when she chose. She wasn't afraid of the rapist, who hadn't been heard from in several days. A pleasurable tension drove her toward the lighted windows of the labs. This was like moving through the sharp air of the bushveldt at dusk.

The lab blinds, tilted down, let out only threads of light. She could see nothing. She hovered a moment, then turned back, hurrying now. The mood was broken, and she felt silly; Daniel from Security would be furious to find her alone out here, and what could she tell him? That she felt herself to be on the track of something wild and it made her feel young?

Miss Donnelly and the others were still talking. Katje was glad to hear their wry voices and gusts of laughter, equally glad not to have to sit with them. At first she had been hurt by the social exclusions that had followed her hiring on at the club; now she was grateful.

She had more on her mind than school gossip, and she needed to think. Her own impulsive act excited and appalled her: sallying forth at dusk at some risk (her mind swerved neatly around the other, the imaginary danger), and for what? To sniff the breeze and search the ground for tracks?

The thought of Dr. Weyland haunted her: Dr. Weyland as the restless visitor to the club kitchen; Dr. Weyland as the enigma of faculty gossip; Dr. Weyland as she had first thought of him the other morning in the lab-building parking lot.

She was walking to the bus stop when Jackson drove up and offered her a lift. She was glad to accept. The lonesomeness of the campus was accentuated by darkness and the empty circles of light around the lamp posts.

Jackson pulled aside a jumble of equipment on the front seat—radio parts, speakers, and wires—to make room for her. Two books were on the floor by her feet. He said, "The voodoo book is left over from my brother Paul. He went through a thing, you know, trying to trace back our family down in Louisiana. The other one was just lying around."

The other one was *Dracula*. Katje felt the gummy spot where the price sticker had been peeled off. Jackson must have bought it for her at the discount bookstore downtown. She didn't know how to thank him easily, so she said nothing.

"It's a long walk out to the bus stop," Jackson said, scowling as he drove out of the stone gates of the college drive. "They should've let you stay on in faculty housing after your husband died."

"They needed the space for another teacher," Katje said. She missed the cottage on the east side of campus, but her present rooming-house lodgings away from school offered more privacy.

He shook his head. "Well, I think it's a shame, you being a foreign visitor and all."

Katje laughed. "After twenty-five years in this country, a visitor?"

He laughed too. "Yeah. Well, you sure have moved around in our society more than most while you been here; from lady of leisure to, well, maid work." She saw the flash of his grin. "Just like my old auntie that used to do for white women up the hill. Don't you mind?"

She minded when she thought working at the club would never end. Sometimes the Africa she remembered seemed too vague a place to go back to now, and the only future she could see was keeling over at the end while vacuuming the club, like a farmer worn to death at his plow. . . .

None of this was Jackson's business. "Did your auntie mind her work?" she snapped.

Jackson pulled up opposite the bus stop. "She said you just do what it comes to you to do and thank God for it."

"I say the same."

He sighed. "You're a lot like her, you know? Someday I got a bunch of questions to ask you about how it was when you lived in Africa. I mean, was it like they show in the movies, you know, *King Solomon's Mines* and like that?"

Katje had never seen that movie, but she knew that nothing on film could be like her Africa. "No, she said. 'You should go to Africa sometime and see for yourself.'"

"I'm working on it. There's your bus coming. Wait a minute, listen—no more walking alone out here after dark. There's not enough people around now. You got to arrange to be picked up. Didn't you hear? That guy jumped another girl last night. She got away, but still. Daniel says he found one of the back doors to the club unlocked. You be careful, will you? I don't want to have to come busting in there to save you from some deranged, six-foot pre-med on the rampage, know what I mean? Skinny dude like me could get real ruined that way."

"Oh, I will take care of myself," Katje said, touched and annoyed and amused all at once by his solicitude.

"Sure. Only I wish you were about fifteen years younger and studying karate, you know?"

As she climbed out of the car with the books on her arm he added, "You do any shooting in Africa? Hunting and stuff?"

"Yes, quite a lot."

"Okay; take this." He pulled metal out of his pocket and put it in her hand. It was a gun. "Just in case. You know how to use it, right?"

She closed her fingers on the compact weight of it. "But where did you get this? Do you have papers for it? The laws here are very strict—"

He tugged the door shut and said through the open window, "I live in a rough neighborhood, and I got friends. Hurry up, you'll miss your bus."

Dracula was a silly book. She had to force herself to read on in spite of the phony Dutchman Ven Helsing, an insult to anyone of Dutch descent. The voodoo book was impenetrable, and she soon gave it up in disgust.

The handgun was another matter. She sat at the formica-topped table in her kitchenette and turned the shiny little automatic in the light, thinking. How had Jackson come by such a thing, or for that matter, how did he afford his fancy sports car and all that equipment he carried in it from time to time—where did it all come from and where did it go? He was up to something, probably lots of things—what they called "hustling" nowadays. A good thing he had given her the gun. It could only get him into trouble to carry it around with him. She knew how to handle weapons, and surely with a rapist at large the authorities would be understanding about her lack of a license for it.

The gun needed cleaning. She worked on it as best she could without the right tools. It was a cheap .25-caliber gun. Back home your gun was a fine rifle, made to drop a charging rhino in his tracks, not a stubby little nickel toy like this for scaring off muggers and rapists.

Yet she wasn't sorry to have it. Her own hunting gun that she had brought from Africa years ago was in storage with the extra things from the cottage. She realized now that she had missed its presence lately—since the beginning of the secret stalking of Dr. Weyland.

She went to sleep with the gun on the night table next to her bed.

She woke listening for the roar so she would know in what direction to look tomorrow for the lion's spoor. There was a hot, rank odor of African dust in the air, and she sat up in bed thinking, he's been here.

It was a dream. But it had been so clear! She went to look out the front window without turning on the light, and it was the ordinary street below that seemed unreal. Her heart drummed in her chest. Not that he would come after her here on Dewey Street, but he had sent Nettie to the club, and now he had sent this dream into her sleep. Creatures stalking one another over time grew a bond from mind to mind. But that was in another life.

Was she losing her sanity? She read for a little in the Afrikaans Bible she had brought with her from home but so seldom opened in recent years. What gave comfort in the end was to put Jackson's automatic into her purse to carry with her. A gun was supposedly of no use against a vampire—you needed a wooden stake, she remembered reading, or you had to cut off his head to kill him—but the weight of the weapon in her handbag reassured her.

The lecture hall was full in spite of the scarcity of students on campus this time of year. These special talks were open to the town as well.

Dr. Weyland read his lecture in a stiff, abrupt manner. He stood cramped slightly over the lectern, which was low for his height, and rapped out his sentences, rarely raising his eyes from his notes. In his tweeds and heavy-rimmed glasses he was the picture of the scholarly recluse drawn

out of the study into the limelight. His lecture was brief; he fulfilled with unmistakable impatience the duty set every member of the faculty to give one public address per year on an aspect of his work.

The audience didn't mind. They had come prepared to be spellbound by the great Dr. Weyland speaking on the demonology of dreams. At the end there were questions, most of them obviously designed to show the questioner's cleverness rather than to elicit information. The discussions after these lectures were usually the real show. Katje, lulled by the abstract talk, came fully to attention when a young woman asked, "Professor, have you considered whether the legends of such supernatural creatures as werewolves, vampires, and dragons are not distortions out of nightmares, as many think; that maybe the legends reflect the existence of real, though rare, prodigies of evolution?"

Dr. Weyland hesitated, coughed, sipped water. "The forces of evolution are capable of prodigies, certainly," he said. "You have chosen an excellent word. But we must understand that we are not speaking—in the case of the vampire, for example—of a blood-sipping phantom who cringes from a clove of garlic. How could nature design such a being?"

"The corporeal vampire, if it existed, would be by definition the greatest of all predators, living as he would off the top of the food chain. Man is the most dangerous animal, the devourer or destroyer of all others, and the vampire preys on man. Now, any sensible vampire would choose to avoid the risks of attacking humans by tapping the blood of lower animals if he could; so we must assume that our vampire cannot. Perhaps animal blood can tide him over a lean patch, as seawater can sustain a castaway for a few miserable days but can't permanently replace fresh water to drink. Humanity would remain the vampire's livestock, albeit fractious and dangerous to deal with, and where they live, so must he.

"In the sparsely settled early world he would be bound to a town or village to assure his food supply. He would learn to live on little—perhaps a half-liter of blood per day—since he could hardly leave a trail of drained corpses and hope to go unnoticed. Periodically, he would withdraw for his own safety and to give the villagers time to recover from his depredations. A sleep several generations long would provide him with an untouched, ignorant population in the same location. He would have to be able to slow his metabolism, to induce in himself naturally a state of suspended animation; mobility in time would become his alternative to mobility in space."

Katje listened intently, thinking yes, he is the sort of animal that lies in wait for the prey to come his way. His daring in speaking this way stirred her; she could see he was beginning to enjoy the game, growing more at ease at the podium as he warmed to his subject.

"The vampire's slowed body functions during these long rest periods might help extend his lifetime; so might living for long periods, waking or sleeping, on the edge of starvation. We know that minimal feeding produces striking longevity in some other species. Long life would be a highly desirable alternative to reproduction, since a vampire would flourish best with the least competition. The great predator would not wish to sire his own rivals. It could not be true that his bite would turn his victims into vampires like himself—"

"Or we'd be up to our necks in fangs," whispered someone in the audience rather loudly.

"Fangs are too noticeable and not efficient for blood sucking," observed Dr. Weyland. "Large, sharp canine teeth are designed to tear meat. Polish versions of the vampire legend would be closer to the mark: They tell of some sort of puncturing device, perhaps a needle in the tongue like a sting that would secrete an anticlotting substance. That way the vampire could seal his lips around the wound and draw the blood freely without having to rip great, spouting, wasteful holes in his unfortunate prey." Dr. Weyland smiled.

Would a vampire sleep in a coffin? Someone asked.

"Certainly not," Dr. Weyland retorted. "Would you, given a choice? The corporeal vampire would require physical access to the world, which is something that burial

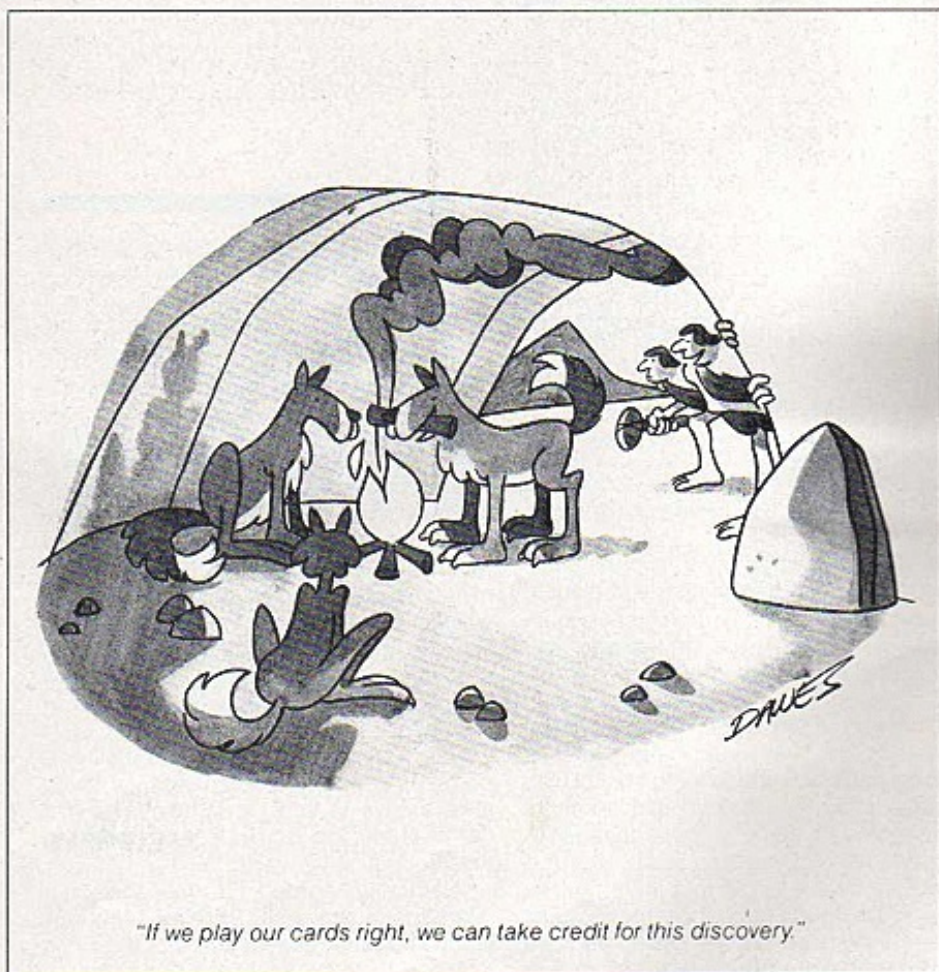
customs generally prevent. He might retire to a cave or take his rest in a tree like Merlin, or Ariel in the cloven pine, provided he could find either tree or cave safe from wilderness freaks and developers' bulldozers.

"Finding a secure resting place is one obvious problem for our vampire in modern times," he continued. "There are others. Upon each waking he must quickly adapt to his new surroundings, a task that, we may imagine, has grown progressively more difficult with the rapid acceleration of cultural change since the Industrial Revolution. In the past century and a half he has no doubt had to limit his sleeps to shorter and shorter periods for fear of completely losing touch. This curtailment of his rest might be expected to wear him down and render him increasingly irritable."

He paused to adjust his glasses, now as visibly relaxed as Katje had seen him in her kitchen at the club. Someone called out, "Could a corporeal vampire get a toothache?"

"Assuredly," replied Dr. Weyland. "He is, after all, a stage of humanity, real though hard to come by. He would no doubt also need a haircut now and then and could only put his pants on, as humorists have said since the widespread adoption of trousers, one leg at a time.

"Since we posit a natural rather than a supernatural being, he grows older, but slowly. Meanwhile, each updating of him-



self is more challenging and demands more from him—more imagination, more energy, more cunning. While he must adapt sufficiently to disguise his anomalous existence, he must not succumb to current ideologies of Right or Left—that is, to the cant of individual license or to the cant of the infallibility of the masses—lest either allegiance interfere with the exercise of his predatory survival skill.

Meaning, Katje thought grimly, he can't afford scruples about drinking our blood.

Emrys Williams raised a giggle by commenting that a lazy vampire could always take home a pretty young instructor to show him the new developments in interpersonal relations.

Dr. Weyland fixed him with a cold glance. "You are mixing up dinner with sex," he remarked, "and not, I gather, for the first time."

They roared. Williams—the "tame Wild Welshman of the Lit. Department" to his less admiring colleagues—turned a gratified pink.

One of Dr. Weyland's associates in Anthropology pointed out at boring length that the vampire, born in an earlier age, would become dangerously conspicuous for his diminutive height as the human race grew taller.

"Not necessarily," commented Dr. Weyland. "Remember that we speak of a highly specialized physical form. It may be that during his waking periods his metabolism is so sensitive that he responds to the stimuli in the environment by growing in his body as well as in his mind. Perhaps while he's awake his entire being exists at an intense inner level of activity and change. The stress of these great rushes to catch up all at once with physical, mental, and cultural evolution must be enormous. No wonder he needs his long sleeps."

He glanced at the clock on the wall. "As you can see, by the application of a little logic and imagination we come up with a creature bearing superficial resemblances to the vampire of legend, but at base one quite different from your standard strolling corpse with an aversion to crosses. Next question?"

They weren't willing to end this flight of fancy. Someone asked how he accounted for the superstitions about crosses and garlic and so on.

Dr. Weyland sipped water from the glass at hand while contemplating the audience. He said finally, "Primitive men first encountering the vampire would be unaware that they themselves were products of evolution. They would have no way of knowing that he was a still higher product of the same process. They would make up stories to account for him and to try to control him. In early times the vampire himself might even believe in some of these legends—the silver bullet, the oaken stake."

"But waking at length in a more rational age, he would abandon these notions just as everyone else did. A clever vampire might even make use of the folklore. For

instance, it is generally supposed that Bram Stoker was inspired to write *Dracula* by his meeting with a Rumanian professor of Oriental languages from Pest University; I refer you to a recent biography of Stoker by Daniel Farson. Why was this Professor Arminius Vambery in London at just the right time, a guest at a certain eating club along with Stoker on a certain night? How did Vambery come to have a wealth of tantalizing detail about the vampire superstition at his fingertips? Ladies and gentlemen, take note: There is a research paper in it somewhere."

He didn't wait for their laughter to die away but continued, "Any intelligent vampire sensitive to the questing spirit of those times would have developed a passionate interest in his own origin and evolution. Now, who was Arminius Vambery, and why his ceaseless exploration of that same subject?"

"Eventually our vampire prudently retires. Imagine his delight upon waking half

● *Eventually our vampire
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a century later to find vampire legends a common currency of the popular culture and *Dracula* a classic."

"Wouldn't he be lonely?" sighed a girl standing in the side aisle, her posture eloquent of the desire to comfort that loneliness.

"The young lady will forgive me," Dr. Weyland responded, "if I observe that this is a question born of a sheltered life. Predators in nature do not indulge in the sort of romantic moonings that humans impute to them. As for our vampire, even if he had the inclination he wouldn't have the time. On each waking he has more to learn. Perhaps someday the world will return to a reasonable rate of change, permitting him some leisure in which to feel lonely or whatever suits him."

A nervous girl ventured the opinion that a perpetually self-educating vampire would always have to find himself a place in a center of learning in order to have access to the information he would need.

"Naturally," agreed Dr. Weyland drily. "Perhaps a university, where strenuous study and other eccentricities of the living intellect would be accepted behavior in a

grown man. Possibly even a modest institution like Cayslin College would serve."

Under the chuckling following this came a question too faint for Katje to hear. Dr. Weyland, having bent to listen, straightened up and announced sardonically, "The lady desires me to comment upon the vampire's 'Satanic pride.' Madam, here you enter the area of the literary imagination and its devices, where I dare not tread under the eyes of my colleagues from the English Department. Perhaps they will pardon me if I merely point out that a tiger who falls asleep in a jungle and on waking finds a thriving city overgrowing his lair has no energy to spare for displays of Satanic pride."

That's nerve, Katje thought; Dr. Weyland expounding on a vampire's pride—what an exercise in arrogance!

Williams, intent on having the last word as always, spoke up once more: "The vampire as time traveler—you ought to be writing science fiction, Weyland," which provoked a growing patter of applause. It was evident that the evening was ending.

Katje went out with the crowd, but withdrew to stand outside under the portico of the Union Building. She saw Dr. Weyland's car across the street, gleaming in the lamplight: his access to physical mobility and a modern mechanical necessity that he had mastered. No wonder he loved it.

With the outwash of departing audience came Miss Donnelly. She asked if Katje needed a lift: "There's my car, the rusty, trusty Volks." Katje explained that a group of women from the staff cafeteria went bowling together each Friday night and had promised to come by and pick her up.

"I'll wait with you just in case," Miss Donnelly said. "You know, Wild Man Williams is a twerp, but he was right: Weyland's vampire would be a time traveler. He could only go forward, of course, never back, and only by long, unpredictable leaps—this time, say, into our age of what we like to think of as technological marvels; maybe next time into an age of interstellar travel. Who knows, he might get to taste Martian blood, if there are Martians, and if they have blood."

"Frankly, I wouldn't have thought Weyland could come up with anything so imaginative as that—the vampire as a sort of living saber-toothed tiger prowling the pavements, a truly endangered species. That's next term's T-shirt: SAVE THE VAMPIRE."

Miss Donnelly might banter, but she would never believe. It was all a joke to her, a clever mental game invented by Dr. Weyland for his audience. No point consulting her.

Miss Donnelly added ruefully, "You've got to hand it to the man. He's got a tremendous stage presence, and he sure knows how to turn on the charm when he feels like it. Nothing too smooth, mind you, just enough unbending, enough slightly caustic graciousness, to set susceptible hearts a-beating. You could almost forget what a

ruthless, self-centered bastard he can be. Did you notice that most of the comments came from women? Is that your lift?"

It was. While the women in the station wagon shuffled themselves around to make room, Katje stood with her hand on the door and watched Dr. Weyland emerge from the building with admiring students at either hand. He loomed above them, his hair silver under the lamplight. For over-civilized people to experience the approach of such a predator as sexually attractive was not strange. She remembered Scotty saying once that the great cats were all beautiful, and maybe beauty helped them to capture their prey.

He turned his head, and she thought for a moment that he was looking at her as she got into the station wagon.

What could she do that wouldn't arouse total disbelief and a suspicion that she herself was crazy? She couldn't think amid the tired, satisfied ramblings of her bowling friends, and she declined to stay up socializing with them. They didn't press her. She was not one of their regular group.

Sitting alone at home, Katje had a cup of hot milk to calm herself for sleep. To her perplexity, her mind kept wandering from thoughts of Dr. Weyland to memories of drinking cocoa at night with Henrik and the African students he used to bring to dinner. They had been native boys to her, dressed up in suits and talking politics like white men, flashing photographs of black babies playing with toy trucks and walkie-talkie sets. Sometimes they had gone to see documentary films of an Africa full of cities and traffic and black professionals exhorting, explaining, running things, as these students expected to do in their turn when they went home.

She thought about home now. She recalled clearly all those indicators of irrevocable change in Africa, and she saw suddenly that the old life there had gone. She would return to an Africa largely as foreign to her as America had been at first. Reluctantly, she admitted one of her feelings when listening to Dr. Weyland talk had been an unwilling empathy with him: If he was a one-way time traveler, so was she.

As the vampire could not return to simpler times, so Katje saw herself cut off from the life of raw vigor, the rivers of game, the smoky village air, all viewed from the lofty heights of white privilege. One did not have to sleep half a century to lose one's world these days; one had only to grow older.

Next morning she found Dr. Weyland leaning, hands in pockets, against one of the columns flanking the entrance to the club. She stopped some yards from him, her purse hanging heavily on her arm. The hour was early, the campus deserted-looking. Stand still, she thought; show no fear.

He looked at her. "I saw you after the lecture last night, and earlier in the week, outside the lab one evening. You must know better than to wander alone at night; the campus empty, no one around—anything

might happen. If you are curious, Mrs. de Groot, come do a session for me. All your questions will be answered. Come over tonight. I could stop by here for you in my car on the way back to the lab after dinner. There is no problem with scheduling, and I would welcome your company. I sit alone over there these nights hoping some impoverished youngster, unable to afford a trip home at intercession, will be moved by an uncontrollable itch for travel to come to my lab and earn his fare."

She felt fear knocking heavily in her body. She shook her head, no.

"My work would interest you, I think," he went on, watching her. "You are an alert, fine-looking woman; they waste your qualities here. Couldn't the college find you something better than to be a housekeeper for them after your husband died? You might consider coming over regularly to help me with some clerical chores until I get a new assistant. I pay well."

Astonished out of her fear at the offer of

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work in the vampire's lair, she found her voice: "I am a country woman, Dr. Weyland, a daughter of farmers. I have no proper education. We never read books at home, except the Bible. My husband didn't want me to work. I have spent my time in this country learning English and cooking and how to shop for the right things. I have no skills, no knowledge but the little that I remember of the crops and weather and customs of another country—and even that is probably out of date. I would be no use in work like yours."

Hunched in his coat with the collar upturned, looking at her slightly askance, his tousled hair gleaming with the damp, he had the aspect of an old hawk, intent but aloof. He broke the pose, yawned behind his large-knuckled hand, and straightened up.

"As you like. Here comes your friend Nellie."

"Nellie," Katje corrected, suddenly outraged: he'd drunk Nellie's blood; the least he could do was remember her name properly. But he was vanishing over the lawn toward the lab.

Nettie came panting up. "Who was that?

Did he try to attack you?"

"It was Dr. Weyland," Katje said. She hoped Nettie didn't notice her trembling, which Katje tried to conceal.

Nettie laughed. "What is this, a secret romance?"

Miss Donnelly came into the kitchen toward the end of the luncheon for the departing Emeritus. She plumped herself down between Nettie and Katje, who were taking a break and preparing desert, respectively. Katje spooned whipped cream carefully into each glass dish of fruit.

Miss Donnelly said, "In case I get too smashed to say this later, thanks. On the budget I gave you, you did just great. The Department will put on something official with Beef Wellington and trimmings, over at Borchard's, but it was really important for some of us lowly types to give Sylvia our own alcoholic farewell feast, which we couldn't have done without your help."

Nettie nodded and stubbed out her cigarette.

"Our pleasure," Katje said, preoccupied. Dr. Weyland had come for her, would come back again; he was hers to deal with, but how? She no longer thought of sharing her fear, not with Nettie with her money worries or with Miss Donnelly, whose eyes were just now faintly swimmy-looking with drink. Weyland the vampire was not for a committee to deal with. Only fools left it to committees to handle life and death.

"The latest word," Miss Donnelly added bitterly, "is that the Department plans to fill Sylvia's place with some guy from Oregon, which means the salary goes up half as much again or more inside of six months."

"Them's the breaks," Nettie said, not very pleasantly. She caught Katje's eye with a look that said, Look who makes all the money and look who does all the complaining.

"Them is," Miss Donnelly agreed glumly. "As for me, the word is no tenure, so I'll be moving on in the fall. Me and my big mouth. Wacker nearly fainted at my prescription for stopping the rapes: You trap the guy, disembowel him, and hang his balls over the front gate. Our good dean doesn't know me well enough to realize it's all front. On my own I'd be too petrified to try anything but talking the bastard out of it. You know, 'Now you just let me get my dress back on, and I'll make us each a cup of coffee, and you tell me all about why you hate women.'"

She stood up, groaning.

"Did you hear what happened to that girl last night, the latest victim? He cut her throat. Ripped her pants off but didn't even bother raping her; that's how desperate for sex he is."

Katje said, "Jackson told us about the killing this morning."

"Jackson? Oh, the maintenance man. Look out, it could even be him. Any of them, damn them," she muttered savagely as she turned away, "living off us, kicking our bodies out of the way when they're through—"

She stumbled out of the kitchen.

Nettie snorted. "She's always been one of those libbers. No wonder Wacker's getting rid of her. Some men act like hogs, but you can't let yourself be turned into a man-hater. A man's the only chance a girl has of getting up in the world, you know?" She pulled on a pair of acid-yellow gloves and headed for the sink. "If I want out of these rubber gloves I have to marry a guy who can afford to pay a maid."

Katje sat looking at the fruit dishes with their plump cream caps. It was just as the Bible said. She felt it happen: The scales fell from her eyes. She saw clearly and thought, I am a fool.

Bad pay is real, rape is real, killing is real. The real world worries about real dangers, not childish fancies of a night prowler who drinks blood. Dr. Weyland took the trouble to be concerned, to offer extra work, while I was thinking idiot things about him. Where does it come from, this nonsense of mine? My life is dull since Henrik died; so I make up drama in my head, and that way I get to think about Dr. Weyland, a distinguished and learned gentleman, being interested in me.

She resolved to go to the lab building later and leave a note for Dr. Weyland, an apology for her reluctance, an offer to stop by soon and make an appointment at the sleep lab.

Nettie looked at the clock and said over her shoulder, "Time to take the ladies their dessert."

At last the women had dispersed, leaving the usual fog of smoke behind. Katje and Nettie had finished the cleaning up. Katje said, "I'm going for some air."

Nettie, wreathed by smoke of her own making, drowsed in one of the big living-room chairs. She shook her head. "Not me. I'm pooped." She sat up. "Unless you want me along. It's still light out, so you're safe from the Cayslin Ripper."

"Don't disturb yourself," Katje said.

Away on the far edge of the lawn three students danced under the sailing shape of a Frisbee. Katje looked up at the sun, a silver disc behind a thin place in the clouds; more rain coming, probably. The campus still wore a deserted look. Katje wasn't worried; there was no vampire, and the gun in her purse would suffice for anything else.

The sleep lab was locked. She tucked her note of apology between the lab door and the jamb and left.

As she started back across the lawn someone stepped behind her, and long fingers closed on her arm: It was Dr. Weyland. Firmly and without a word he bent her course back toward the lab.

"What are you doing?" she said, astonished.

"I almost drove off without seeing you. Come sit in my car, I want to talk to you." She held back, alarmed, and he gave her a sharp little shake. "Making a fuss is pointless. No one is here to notice. No one would believe."

There was only his car in the parking lot; even the Frisbee players had gone. Dr. Weyland opened the door of his Mercedes and pushed Katje into the front passenger seat with a deft, powerful thrust of his arm. He got in on the driver's side, snapped down the automatic door locks, and sat back. He looked up at the gray sky, then at his watch.

She said, "What are we waiting for?"

"For the day man to leave and lock up the lab. I don't like to be interrupted."

This is what it's like, Katje thought, feeling lethargic detachment stealing through her, paralyzing her. No hypnotic power out of a novelist's imagination held her, but the spell cast on the prey of the hunting cat, the shock of being seized in the deadly jaws, though not a drop of blood was yet spilled. "Interrupted," she whispered.

"Yes," he said, turning toward her. She saw the naked craving in his gaze. "Interrupted at whatever it pleases me to do with you. You are on my turf now, Mrs. de Groot."

*Weyland had lifted his
red-smeared hands to his
face, and he was
licking the blood from his
fingers. Katje could
see his throat working as he
strained to swallow his
food. . . . A siren sounded.*

where you have persisted in coming time after time. I can't wait any longer for you to make up your mind. You are healthy—I looked up your records—and I am hungry. You may live to walk away after, I don't know yet—who would listen to a mad old woman? I can tell you this much: Your chances are better if you don't speak."

The car smelled of cold metal, leather, and tweed. At length a man came out of the lab building and bent to unlock the chain from the only bicycle in the bike rack. By the way Dr. Weyland shifted in his seat, Katje saw that this was the departure he had been awaiting.

"Look at that idiot," he muttered. "Is he going to take all night?" She saw him turn restlessly toward the lab windows. That would be the place, after a bloodless blow to stun her—he wouldn't want any mess in his Mercedes.

In her lassitude she was sure that he had attacked that girl, drunk her blood, and then killed her. He was using the rapist's activities as cover. When subjects did not come to him at the sleep lab, hunger drove him out to hunt. Perhaps he was glad then to put aside his civilized disguise.

She thought, *But I am myself a hunter!* Cold anger coursed through her. Her thoughts flew: She needed time, a moment out of his reach to plan her survival. She had to get out of the car—any subterfuge would do.

She gulped and turned toward him, croaking, "I'm going to be sick."

He swore furiously. The locks clicked; he reached roughly past her and shoved open the door on her side: "Out!"

She stumbled out into the drizzling, chilly air and backed several hasty paces, hugging her purse to her body like a shield, looking quickly around. The man on the bike had gone. The upper story of the Cayslin Club across the lawn showed a light—Nettie would be missing her now. Maybe Jackson would be just arriving to pick them up. But no help could come in time.

Dr. Weyland had gotten out of the car. He stood with his arms folded on the roof of the Mercedes, looking across at her with a mixture of annoyance and contempt. "Mrs. de Groot, do you think you can outrun me?"

He started around the front of his car toward her.

Scotty's voice sounded quietly in her ear: "Yours," he said, as the leopard tensed to charge. Weyland too was an animal, not an immortal monster out of legend—just a wild beast, however smart and strong and hungry. He had said so himself.

She jerked out the automatic, readying it to fire as she brought it swiftly up to eye level in both hands while her mind told her calmly that a head shot would be best but that a hit was surer if she aimed for the torso.

She shot him twice, two slugs in quick succession, one in the chest and one in the abdomen. He did not fall but bent to clutch at his torn body, and he screamed and screamed so that she was too shaken to steady her hands for the head shot afterward. She cried out also, involuntarily: His screams were dreadful. It was long since she had killed anything.

Footsteps rushed behind her, arms flung round her, pinning her hands to her sides so that the gun pointed at the ground and she couldn't fire at Weyland again. Jackson's voice gasped in her ear, "Jesus Creeping Christ!"

His car stood where he had braked it, unheard by Katje. Nettie jumped out and rushed toward Katje, crying, "My God, he's shot, she shot him!"

Breaking off his screaming, Weyland tottered away from them around his car and fetched up, leaning on the front. His face, a hollow-cheeked, starving mask, gaped at them.

"It's him?" Jackson said incredulously. "He tried to rape you?"

Katje shook her head. "He's a vampire." "Vampire, hell!" Jackson exploded in a breathless laugh. "He's a Goddamn dead rapist, that's what he is! Jesus!"

Weyland panted, "Stop staring, cattle!" He wedged himself heavily into the driver's seat of his car. They could see him

slumped there, his forehead against the curve of the steering wheel. Blood spotted the Mercedes where he had leaned.

"Mrs. de Groot, give me the gun," Jackson said.

Katje clenched her fingers around the grip. "No."

She could tell by the way Jackson's arms tightened that he was afraid to let go of her and grab for the gun. He said, "Nettie, take my car and go get Daniel!"

Nettie moaned. "My God, look! What's he doing?"

Weyland had lifted his red-smeared hands to his face, and he was licking the blood from his fingers. Katje could see his throat working as he strained to swallow his food, his life.

A siren sounded. Nettie cried in wild relief. "That's Daniel's car coming!"

Weyland raised his head. His gray face was rigid with determination. He snarled, "I won't be put on show! The door—one of you shut the door!" He started the engine.

His glaring face commanded them. Nettie darted forward, slammed the door, and recoiled, wiping her hand on her sweater.

Eyes blind to them now, Weyland drove the Mercedes waveringly past them, out of the parking lot toward the gateway road. Rain swept down in heavy gusts. Katje heard the siren again and woke to her failure: She had not made a clean kill. The vampire was getting away.

She lunged toward Jackson's car. He held her back, shouting, "Nothing doing, come on, you done enough!"

The Mercedes crawled haltingly down the middle of the road, turned at the stone gates, and was gone.

Jackson said, "Now will you give me that gun?"

Katje snapped on the safety and dropped the automatic on the wet paving at their feet.

Nettie was pointing toward the club. "There's people coming. They must have heard the shooting and called Daniel. Listen, Jackson, we're in trouble. Nobody's going to believe that Dr. Weyland is the rapist—or the other thing either." Her glance flickered nervously over Katje. "Whatever we say, they'll think we're crazy."

"Oh, shit," said Jackson tiredly, letting Katje go at last. He stooped to retrieve the gun. Katje saw the apprehension in his face as he weighed Nettie's assessment of their situation: a wild story from some cleaning people about the eminent professor—

"We've got to say something," Nettie went on desperately. "All that blood—" She fell silent, staring.

There was no blood. The rain had washed the tarmac clean.

Jackson faced Katje and said urgently, "Listen, Mrs. de Groot, we don't know a thing about any shooting, you hear?" He slipped the gun into an inside pocket of his jacket. "You came over to make an appointment at the sleep lab, only Dr. Weyland wasn't around. You waited for him, and Nettie got worried when you didn't come

back, so she called me, and we drove over here looking for you. We all heard shooting, but nobody saw anything. There was nothing to see. Like now."

Katje was furious with him and herself. She should have chanced the head shot; she shouldn't have let Jackson hold her back.

She could see Daniel's car now, wheeling into the parking lot.

Jackson said quietly, "I got accepted to computer school in Rochester for next semester. You can bet they don't do vampires down there, Mrs. de Groot; and they don't do black guys who can get hold of guns, either. Me and Nettie got to live here; we don't get to go away to Africa."

She grew calmer; he was right. The connection had been between herself and the vampire all along, and what had happened here was her own affair. It had nothing to do with these young people.

"All right, Jackson," she said. "There was nothing to see."

"Not a thing," he said in his old, easy manner, and he turned toward Daniel's car.

He would do all right; maybe someday he would come visit her in Africa, in a smart suit and carrying an attaché case, on business. Surely they had computers there now too.

Daniel stepped out of his car into the rain, one hand on the butt of his pistol. Katje saw the disappointment sour his florid face as Nettie put a hand on his arm and began

to talk quietly.

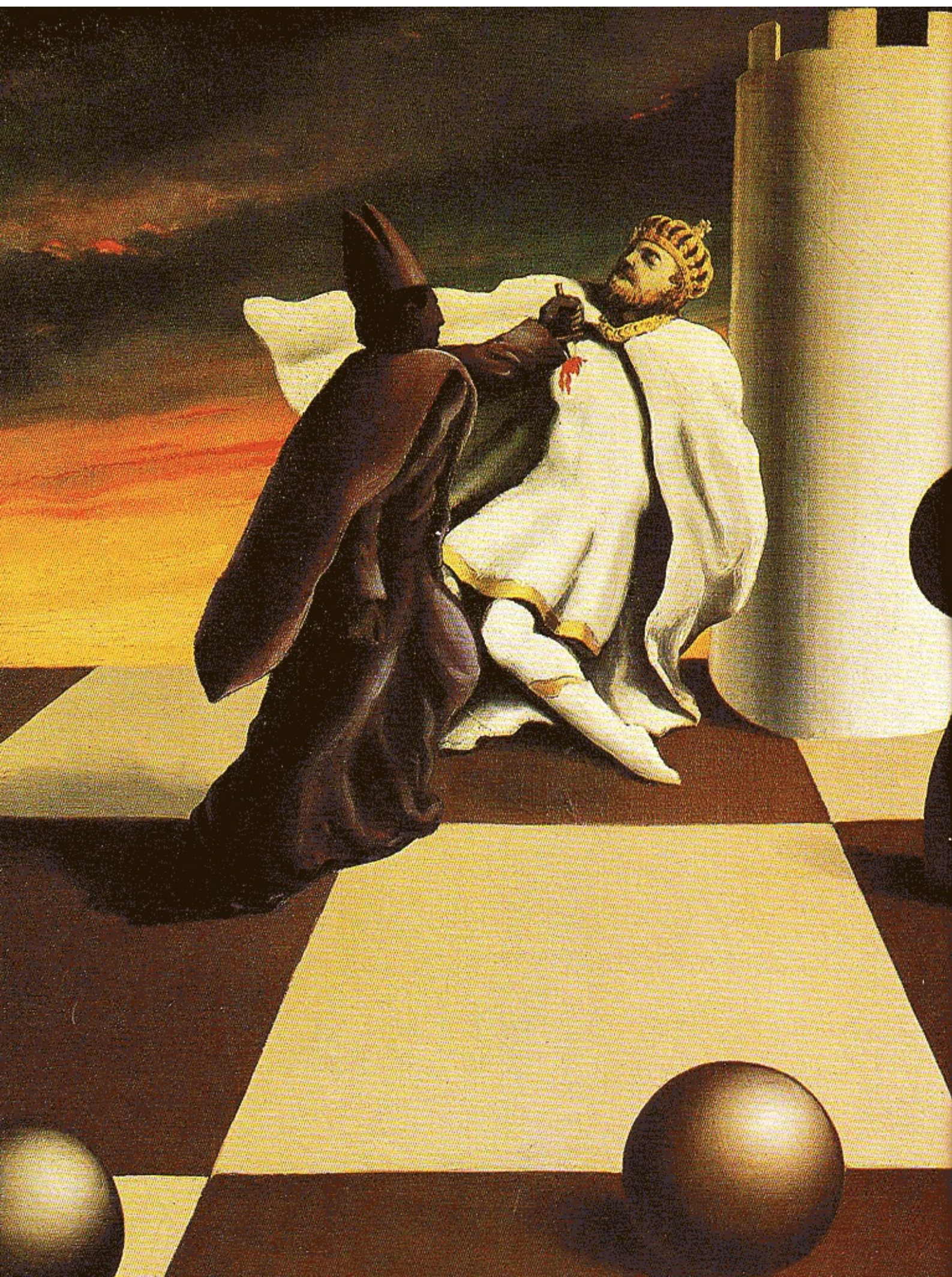
Katje picked up her purse from where she had dropped it—how light it felt now, without the gun in it. She fished out her plastic rain hood, though her hair was already wet. Tying the hood on, she thought about her old Winchester 270, her lion gun. About taking it from storage, putting it in working order, tucking it well back into the broom closet at the club. In case Weyland didn't die, in case he couldn't sleep with two bullets in him and came limping back to hunt on familiar ground, to look for her. He would come next week, when the students returned, or never. She didn't think he would come, but she would be ready just in case.

And then, as she had planned, she would go home to Africa. Her mind flashed: a new life, whatever life she could make for herself there these days. If Weyland could fit himself to new futures, so could she.

But if he did sleep, and woke again 50 years from now? Each generation must look out for itself. She had done her part, although perhaps not well enough to boast about. Still, what a tale it would make some evening over the smoke of a campfire on the veldt, beginning with the tall form of Dr. Weyland seen striding across the parking lot past a kneeling student in the heavy mist of morning....

Katje walked toward Daniel's car to tell the story that Buildings and Grounds would understand. **DD**







*For the competition, he had
carved a beautiful set—
breathing life into every piece.*

THE CHESSMEN

BY WILLIAM G. SHEPHERD

Tomov was most innocent of all. It was this, perhaps, that caused the real confusion, challenged for a moment the course of history, and led eventually to Tomov's death. But Tomov, dead or alive and whatever part he played, is not an important element in this tale; being, as Tomov was, mere flesh and blood.

Our heroes are wood. Exquisitely carved; painted with infinite care; each one a child born through agonies of thought, months of uncertainty, a change here, a new idea there; but wood. Tomov made them.

After the long hours at the dyeing vats of the woolen mill at Rybinskh, it was joy to hurry home to the bench beside the sink, take his little box of tools from the cupboard, and live the evenings with the smooth, warm wood. It was worth the year it took, especially if one had but a small chance of winning the contest and of being rewarded with the trip to Moscow, visits to the shrines, the handshakes of the mighty ones, and—surely—the extra ration coupons. One might even see Comrade Stalin, or find a better job waiting at the mill when one returned.

So Tomov studied, first. He went to the shop of books and page by page looked through a hundred, or a thousand. Even those on back shelves, books so suspect they were like a ticking bomb if one dared have such in one's home, books of which private possession could bring, on any night, the silent thunder of disapproval; even those Tomov turned page by page. And on those pages were the things he sought. A queen, dressed in such flagrant riches it was enough to sicken Tomov, a queen whose very gown told of her faithlessness, her carnal loves. A churchman, pompous, fat, as lecherous as the queen. A king—ah!, these were what Tomov was after. No need to labor his dye-stained fingers with making sketches. Tomov would remember until each vicious line was shaped in the solid oak.

Then the carving. Tomov grew as each completed piece was set aside and a new one begun. The little, easier ones Tomov made first, the eight

chain-laden slaves, the eight strong, sickle-swinging comrades like he'd seen on the collective farms. These he made first so his hands could gain in skill for the master pieces. Next were the two castles, showing by their tumbling towers the decadence they represented. Almost with a shudder Tomov turned from them to shape the perfect tiny replicas of the new apartment house just built in Rybinskh for the faithful of the People's Republic. Then the soldiers. They were easy to think out, to plan, but hard to carve. The effeminate, weak, dull ones were the worst, but even the two broad Russian generals angered Tomov as he carved them, by bringing back to his mouth the taste of mud and snow, by causing the half-healed wound in his hip to ache, by arousing the shame a soldier of the Red Army must feel at remembering his fear. The two fat bishops brought some of the same trouble, for Tomov as a child had held his mother's hand and walked the long mosaic aisle to kiss a ring worn by a kind and gentle man. What one read and heard helped Tomov form the beady eyes, the obese jowls, but the sweat was heavy on his forehead before he felt quite sure his knife had cut the smile from the lips of both. With a sigh of relief he set the pieces with the others and began the commissars. These, when done, left him the task that brought the greatest pleasure. There was nothing the least bit personal, nothing to disturb Tomov in creating the wanton queen. Only ideas well learned went into finishing up the ermine frame and gold-crowned skull for the Capitalist king. And ideals precious to every Russian gave joy to shaping the healthy Peasant boy and girl in regal proportions.

With only one month to work before the contest deadline, Tomov spent every evening turning the carefully stolen bits of powdered dye to paint and bringing final life to every piece. There was not even time to ask Stolovkin to drop in and play a game before the set had to be bundled up neatly and sent off to the Culture Office in Moscow. Tomov regretted that, especially later. If only Stolovkin and he had tried but one game. It might have made Tomov pause, perhaps not send his proud entry to the contest at all. But there was no time.

Tomov shook off another regret. The set would not be returned to him, no one would have seen his handiwork completed. No one except the beggar who had knocked on Tomov's door and, while he waited for a bit of bread, had turned a bishop in his hand and certainly admired the work. The gesture the beggar made as he replaced the piece was odd, thought Tomov. It reminded him of the sign the priest used to make in blessing, back when there had been a priest in Rybinskh. Well the beggar, at least, had seen and liked his chessmen. That was something.

Through the processes of bureaucracies, the decisions would be delayed for some months, the winners unknown. This

should have given Tomov a reprieve; yet in the period of deliberation danger threatened almost at once.

Dosiev, second in command at the Culture Office in Moscow, was struck immediately by the skill, the care, the unusual colors that had gone into entry K2726. He placed the box with the others, between the painting of the Leningrad boy and the bridge made of sticks and twigs, with half an idea in his mind. If Andreievich happened in at the right time, they might return to the office in the evening and play the interesting set. Andreievich was a fine partner for chess, relatively easy to beat yet capable on occasion of creating a difficult situation on the board. It made it pleasant, thought Dosiev, to be challenged and at the same time to know one could pretty surely win. He chuckled as it occurred to him to let Andreievich see what he could do with the king and queen while he, Dosiev—the better player—moved relentlessly on to the inevitable checkmate by the People's men. It would be a moral victory, as well as a personal one.

The evening came, and with it Andreievich. After expressing his pleasure at the workmanship of the pieces and demurring a bit over representing the enemy, Andreievich consented to play the Capitalist set. That he won was of little concern. He had bettered Dosiev once or twice before in the 20-odd times they had played. Besides, looking back, Dosiev remembered he had been rather sleepy that evening. But, somehow or other, Dosiev felt compelled to play again with Andreievich on the same basis with these chessmen.

At the second meeting in the office, Andreievich argued for his right to play the Peasants. Dosiev prevailed upon him to repeat their earlier sides, pointing out that his winning would balance the score not only between Andreievich and himself but between the sets as well. Not to Andreievich but to himself Dosiev admitted he was feeling a little tension about it. This tension, Dosiev reasoned afterwards, was no doubt the cause for Andreievich's winning again.

The third meeting Dosiev handled differently. He smuggled the box of pieces home so they might play in the morning on the holiday. No use letting end-of-day drowsiness or fatigue cause him to play poorly. Also, Dosiev went to bed early and had a full night's sleep. This time there was no trouble with Andreievich about the men. Having won twice with the gaily gruesome royalty, Andreievich was quite happy to stay with them. In fact, as he placed the chained-slave pawns, the fat bishops, the crumbling castles, the weakling knights, the wanton queen, and the skeleton king, Andreievich noticed a feeling of confidence new to him facing Dosiev across a chess board. A third time Andreievich won. Handily, too, with many pieces left and with Dosiev wiped out and helpless. Looking at Dosiev, however, An-

dreievich decided not to laugh aloud as he felt like doing. Instead, he said good day and left.

The following morning, wretched from a night disturbed by many shapeless feelings of anxiety, Dosiev decided to return the chessmen to the office and forget the whole affair. He would not be obliged to participate in the judging. His job was simply to arrange the entries, excluding the impossible works, so that Comrade Donovich and the man from the Kremlin Culture Office could select the winners. For a moment he considered throwing out the chessmen along with the poorer sketches, the too-crude sculpture, and other futile offerings. But no, he was making too much of nothing at all.

On the street Dosiev passed Andreievich. Did his friend walk more erect, his head higher, his chest out? Ridiculous, Dosiev told himself. Even Andreievich's wide grin with his "Good morning!" aroused only a little resentment in Dosiev. But it was a new thing, that grin. The same evening, when Dosiev saw Andreievich looking through the shelves in the back of the shop of books, Dosiev came to a decision. He would somehow place the matter before Comrade Donovich. Tomorrow.

Comrade Donovich was first impatient, then supercilious, then plainly displeased.

"Fool! Because your friend improved and you grew careless at chess, you toss in bed and bother me over the shape of pieces of wood? Fagh! Bring me these chessmen. Let me see these midget monuments that shake you in your boots!"

Although Donovich was without artistic background in any field except that of devising methods for eliciting greater efforts from inmates at a northern camp, he did in a sense justify his appointment as Director of the Moscow Culture Office in his reaction to Tomov's chessmen.

"Aha! Interesting!"

"Nice color. Nice knife work. Clever imagination. Dosiev! I am glad you show me these pieces. I take them home with me and still your fears. Yes, I like these. This fat fellow here, this cleric, looks almost alive. But you are an old woman, Dosiev. Tomorrow I tell you to stop seeing bogeymen in pieces of a tree."

The following morning a pale Comrade Donovich walked worriedly into his office, mumbling to himself. He telephoned his colleague in the Kremlin Culture Office to make an early appointment. He was told to come at once if he was so upset.

Krakov listened closely till Donovich had finished babbling and pacing. When Donovich collapsed into a chair, Krakov reviewed:

"Your wife, you say? Three games, four games? Each time she with the—what did you call it?—with the 'corrupt' set? Then your son, who had never played before and had to be taught the moves? He also won? I do not wonder, Comrade, that you

are pale if you sat up all night playing chess—and teaching it to a child! But this foolishness about evil powers, plots, magic—surely you jest! But no, I see that you do not jest. Have you been well, Comrade?”

Upon Donovich's protests that he had felt perfectly well until the previous evening, Krakov determined he should make some gesture to relieve the man.

“You brought the box? Good. I do not play the game, but leave the box with me. I have friends who play. Some, I believe, who play extremely well.

It was nearly a week later that Donovich was summoned to Krakov's office. The Director of the Moscow Culture Office, his man Dosiev tagging along, entered to face Krakov and two unsmiling members of the Politburo itself standing behind the desk.

“Donovich!”

“Comrade Krakov.”

“These chessmen!”

“Comrade? You have tried them?”

“Donovich, this box is identified only as entry K2726 in our contest. What is the name of the man or woman who made them? The address?”

“Yes, yes. Dosiev, here, has it. Stop shaking, man, and give me the card with the name. Here you are, Comrades. One Alexovich Tomov, Woolen Mill, Rybinskh. You—confirmed my feelings?”

“Tomov, Alexovich, Woolen Mill, Rybinskh. Comrade Donovich, this chess set has been played in exactly sixty-seven engagements. Five of the best players in Moscow have used these pieces, varying possession of the People's men and the enemy men.”

“And the results, Comrade Krakov?”

“As you know, Comrade.”

“The reason, Comrade, have you learned that?”

“We have! Or we have strong suspicions. Each player who used the proletarian pieces experienced a drowsiness as he played. There is evidence that these pieces are treated in some way, probably in the paint or dye, to produce this effect in the handling of the pieces. Very probably these chessmen are the agency of an imperialist design to create uncertainty and fear in our glorious People's Republic.

“We shall see this Tomov traitor, if there is such a one. He will be brought from Rybinskh. Meanwhile, Petroev will come from Stalingrad. Petroev, who has mastered the ablest of the foreigners in the tournaments in London and Paris, will try your chessmen. So superior is his skill, no drowsiness, however maliciously induced, will defeat him. He will win with the peasant pieces.”

Back in Rybinskh, Tomov was not too surprised to learn he would go to Moscow. He was surprised, though, that the message should be brought by two members of the secret police and that he must leave at once, that same night. His wonder at

this fact took away much of the pleasure he felt at winning the contest. (He was sure he had won, or else why the trip to Moscow?) Even at his trial, where he learned he was a traitor and a spy and that this was in some way connected with his chessmen, Tomov was not surprised, because there was not room for surprise amid his efforts to understand what was going on. No one thought—or took the trouble—to mention the “poison” in the dye used to color the proletarian pieces of Tomov's entry. But when the attendants carried his body from the bullet-studded wall, certainly the expression on Tomov's dead face was one of surprise.

The day following this correction of Tomov's error, Petroev, Champion of Chess, arrived in Moscow. When Petroev and the peasant chessmen, playing before several members of the Politburo, lost to each of the five local experts, to Donovich, to Dosiev, and to Donovich's ten-year-old son, the final confirmation had to be sought. It had to be sought if only because word had somehow got to the people of the city. Quietly, but very widely, in the shops, in garages, on the streets, discreet questions were being asked about the losing proletarian chessmen. So wide this knowledge seemed to be that the affair could not be handled by a few swift moves after dark. Faced with the prospect of purging all of Moscow and probably beyond, one realized other measures were demanded.

The Laboratory for Chemical Analysis sent its report:

“Except for the usual chemical elements found in dyes (no doubt stolen from the Woolen Mill at Rybinskh), there are no chemical properties in these wood pieces. The same dyes, in identical color combinations, were used for pieces of both sets. The slightly different appearance of one piece is not due to any detectable additional material used in its manufacture, nor is this one piece part of the set suspected of poisoning.”

The laboratory report was labeled “SOVERSHENNO SEKRETN.” “ABSOLUTELY COMPLETELY SECRET,” and rushed to a special meeting of the Politburo to be presented to Comrade Stalin and his immediate lieutenants. Since Comrade Stalin was indisposed for two days, the meeting had to be postponed.

Comrade Stalin became disposed. The meeting was held. Petroev was invited. Krakov and Donovich were allowed to wait just outside the door for word. A table was placed, and two chairs. The chessmen were set up on the board. Comrade Stalin challenged the evil and himself sat down behind the peasant king. The other chair was taken by that one man in the Politburo most skilled in military maneuvers, most read in the battles of Bonaparte, Caesar, and von Clausewitz, ablest of all the lieutenants at chess. That he had been hurriedly recalled from a foreign post because of a developing taste for western ways added

spice and a touch of humor to the game.

Stalin moved a sickle-swinging pawn. A chess expert? Not he. But a leader with faith in the peasant people represented by his chess set, a leader with faith in the principles for which he lived and fought, a leader with faith in his power over the lieutenant playing opposite him.

Whatever Muses, Fates, or gods watch over games of chess, they were sorely abused that day and are no doubt shuddering still. Perhaps the spirit of Tomov also watched. Justice, not one to understand a special need, soon turned her eyes and dimmed her lamp. For none of the leader's faith had been misplaced. The lieutenant, however hard he tried, could not make an intelligent move. The Donovich boy would have shrieked with delight at the ineffectiveness, but there were only serious faces on the Politburo members crowded around the table. In less than a dozen steps the gaudy queen was gone, the puny soldier-knights and shoddy castles lay aside. Only the bishops, king, and a few stray pawns remained. Yet it happened.

Breath stopped in every watcher, in both players. Not to make the move would have been too absurd. So a bishop stepped a single pace and stared down open passage to the peasant king.

“Check.”

Perhaps it wasn't ever said aloud, the whisper was so low. But every ear heard it. And in the stillness following the word, there was time, too, for every ear to hear the quiet questions of the people of the city.

It was Stalin, the leader, who dared to lead now, to break the stillness. The words came softly in the exhale of a long-held breath:

“Not mate.”

His fist then thundered on the board, hurling the pieces far. His voice was large now, strong and low:

“Check, yes. But not check mate!”

Then still the leader, still the one with strength to act, Stalin picked up the pieces one by one, from the floor, the table, the board. He walked to the fire, dropped the chessmen in. He waited while they burned. For a minute, and another, he watched the smoke.

And then he turned. Again, and quietly, he spoke:

“Always there is a way: by skill, or then by cunning, or by force.”

The others hurried out to tell the people of the city that Stalin, again, had won.

The last to leave knew better. They saw the leader's fist still clutch the wooden bishop. They saw the fist compress and crush till veins stood out and flesh was white. They saw—those last to leave—one tear from the hardened eye run down the cheek and “plop” upon the hearth.

They saw what they would never say: without the skill, the cunning, or the force, the chessmen won. 

THE MICKEY MOUSE OLYMPICS

*Each athlete was developed
to be perfect for each event—which was
awful for the Olympics!*

BY TOM SULLIVAN

A world apart, two specially chartered airliners took to the sky within an hour of each other. First there was the Aeroflot Soviet colossus lifting off the runway of the secret development base near Minsk. Forty minutes later a Pan Am curl-winged behemoth left the maximum-security training complex at Provo, Utah. Each flight maintained a fighter escort in international air space. Each followed a path guaranteed free of man-made weather by its crisis-detection satellite overhead.

To the personnel on board it was unbreached boredom. Occasionally someone made a boast: "We will bury them, eh, Nikita?" "Hey, Stilt, when we start shootin', those suckers gonna bleed red!"

The landings were accomplished on isolated runways of Havana's José Martí Airport. The triple-wire fences were two hundred meters away. In each case a telephoto lens foreshortened the distance.

"*Podyelka!*" screamed the Russian when he saw the films of the American disembarkment hours later.

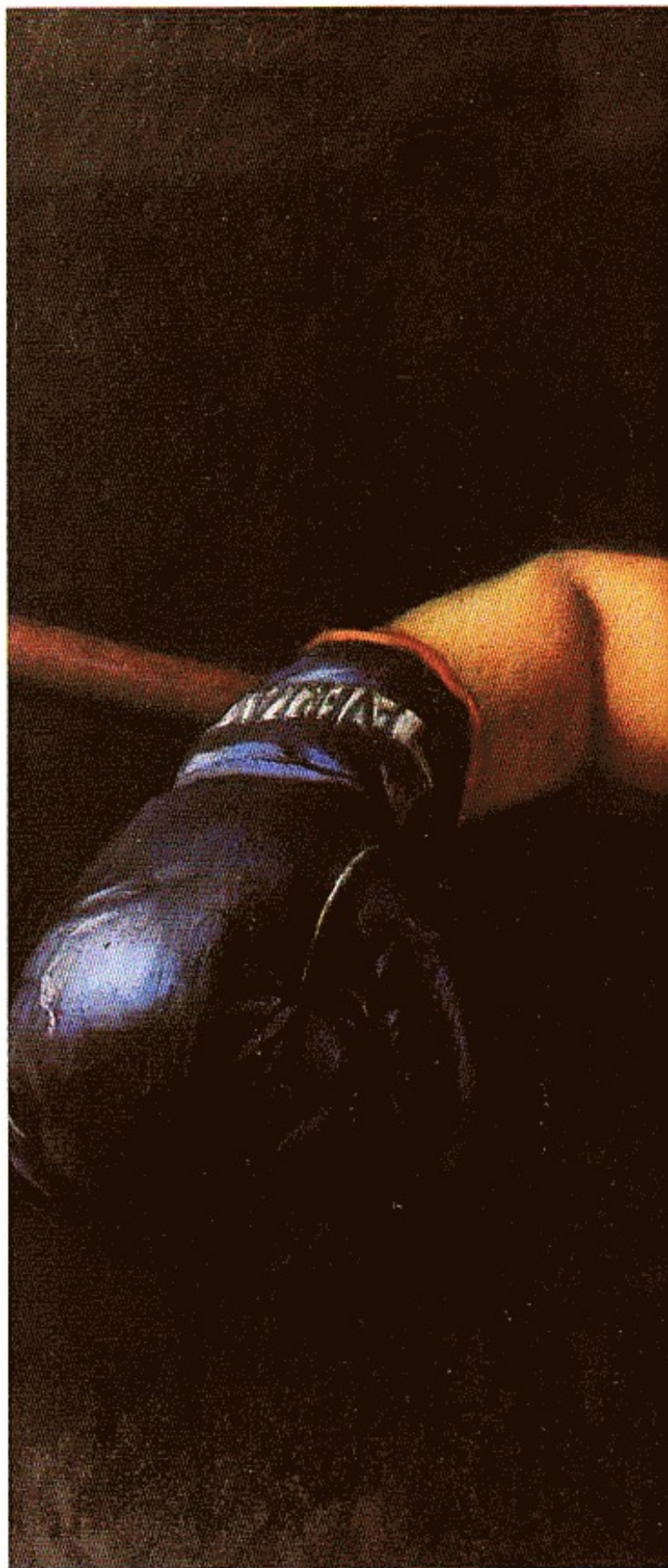
"Fraud!" echoed the American at his own private screening of the Russians' arrival.

The next afternoon they stood side by side in the jammed Olympic stadium, mouthing the oath of brotherhood and fair play. A Babel. One hundred sixteen countries. Sixty-eight languages. When it was done, and the crowd's roar had chilled the platform, Duncan Sherman poured a syrupy smile onto his Russian counterpart.

"Mr. Smerdyakov," he said with benign formality. "I believe we can dispense with a translator."

Giorgi Smerdyakov allowed his own smile to fill out. "Yes, I speak a little English, Mr. Shuer-mann."

Politely but boldly they took each other's measure. The Russian saw a scruffy, tweed-bearded man, white and gray, perhaps an ex-athlete, atrophied now with an indoor skin—a below-ground skin. The American observed a face like an omelette, pan-



PAINTING BY RAY GOODBRED



Goodbye

shaped, slightly askew; the USSR executive chairman had never laced a sport shoe, he felt sure already, and he doubted that the cherubic Smerdyakov could even reach his socks without pulling a hamstring.

"I trust you had a pleasant flight," said Sherman.

"Very pleasant. And you had a smooth landing, I hope."

"Didn't you see it?"

Smerdyakov was caught off guard momentarily, but then Sherman's teeth flashed, and they shared a treacherous laugh.

"I hope the fog didn't spoil your pictures," the Russian said. "We had to use a computer to sharpen ours."

"Ah, Smerdyakov, could a little fog keep us from seeing those weight lifters of yours—the ones that had to get off the plane sideways?"

"The suitcases were bulky," Smerdyakov waved his hand fussily. "We were concerned about that four-meter basketball player of yours, yes? He didn't bump his head, did he? Or was it a female high jumper? My trainer insists it was wearing lipstick!"

"You must have seen Stilt carrying his girl friend on his shoulders. Our tallest is barely nine feet. About three times the height of one of your dwarfs."

"Drawers ... ?" Smerdyakov feigned a language gap.

"Munchkins. You know, mice ... midgets. Little folk?"

"Our gymnastics team is young," Smerdyakov shrugged helplessly. "But let me congratulate you on that odd bone structure so many of your athletes have. For us to equal it, we would have to violate every rule laid down at the second Olympic Convention on Genetic Manipulation."

Like all the Russian staff, Smerdyakov had a doctorate in genetic engineering. Sherman resented that. He couldn't afford to get into details. So he straightened dutifully as the Olympic torch passed by. Round the track it went, an unruly presence in an otherwise respectful pavane. Up the steps it went, to the top of the stadium. There it, too, straightened. Flags fluttered. The Olympic chain ascended hydraulically—a Walt Disney touch. Who else could afford to build the facilities? After the Games the second and fourth rings in the chain would become mouse ears. The flame now leaped to its dish and pillared upward. Another roar avalanched onto the platform where Smerdyakov and Sherman stood. Champagne was poured among the reps.

"To my friend Shuer-mann," Smerdyakov addressed. And delivered a toast in Russian that sent his vestigial translator into hysterics.

Sherman nodded gratefully. "To Smerdyakov," he said, lifting his glass. "ay-May lightning-lay ike-stray is-hay ass-ay!"

Sherman was at the track and field

stadium before the events officially started the next morning, watching the athletes arrive, dictating notes to his Man Friday. As the homogenized delegations cast off their sweat suits for warm-up, he hit upon a scheme for identifying those without numbers. "Autograph?" he would ask, tapping pad and pencil in the face of a select athlete. "Auto-graph, please?" The flattered participant would then sign, while Man Friday snapped a picture. This was necessary because no head-to-head international competition had taken place in fifteen months. That was because of the mandatory chromosome tests. And the chromosome tests were required because of genetic cheating. No one wanted a ruling in an Olympic year.

Sherman saw his first sideshow when the Russian women came out on the field. He could tell they were women because the CCCP was on the left jacket breast as distinguished from the men's right-sided monogram. When the jackets were off,

•The American team lay basking like lizards at the side of a mat on which a freestyle paperweight match ensued between a thyroidal cretin from the Ukraine and a Yankee ... hump. •

there was no distinction. But what really jarred of Sherman—what really filled the mold cast of suspicion and shaped to nonhuman form—were the jumpers.

"My Gawd-d ...," he drawled.

"A flea circus," Man Friday acknowledged tersely.

With piano-wire legs proportioned as uniformly as sausage links, the Russian bevy looked like the insect equivalent of mermaids. In unison they began loosening up. Their jack-in-the-box knee bends, frenetic locomotive drill, and gazellelike bounding erased any doubts.

"Protest, protest, protest," Sherman whispered, rapidly snapping his fingers.

Man Friday grabbed a fistful of forms from his attaché case. But salt 'n' pepper whiskers were already flowing amid the low orbital ballet. "Autograph—get the camera ready, Felix—autograph, please." Man Friday wrestled with attaché, protest forms, and camera.

Suddenly a basso profundo erupted and one of the females advanced on Sherman, rubbing the air in front of her with bunched fingers as if wiping a splat from a windshield.

"It's the coach, sir," said Felix.

Sherman held ground.

"She says, if you come near her girls again, she'll have Ludmilla kick you in the ... in the ..."

"Got it, Felix," Sherman grinned falsely in retreat, saluting with his pencil. A few of the girls giggled. Deeply.

"See that? See that? Touchy. No way, Felix. There's no way they can survive a protest." Sherman drew himself erect, slowed his voice. "Fill it out. A blanket challenge. We'll get the names later."

"What'll I charge, sir?"

"Charge anything. Say you saw them rubbing their hind legs together and chirping. Say their calves are longer than their thighs. We want a chromosome match-up with their parents, damn it! And if necessary their great-great-grandparents—right back to the jackrabbits!"

"Yes, sir," said Felix.

The Russian translation of this scene concurrently took place in Gymnasium 1 of the Multi-Sports Hall, to which Smerdyakov had gone in response to a panic call from the Soviet wrestling coach.

The American team lay basking like lizards at the side of a mat on which a freestyle paperweight match ensued between a thyroidal cretin from the Ukraine and a Yankee pyramidal hump. The pyramidal hump sported its apex between its shoulder blades.

"I could hang my hat on that!" the Russian coach pointed.

Smerdyakov's eyes bugged, his chin retracting into the folds of his neck.

"We've won all our contests but the American ones," the coach shrieked. "They are impossible to pin. Hunchbacks. All of them. We can't even win on points. Pankin bruised his chest executing a hug."

"Protest the losses. When does Korolenko wrestle the American?"

"Next."

The Ukrainian cretin had the American by the legs and was wheeling him around the circle on his hump. Smerdyakov dropped to all fours and beat the mat. The American promptly scissored his opponent down for the count.

"Korolenko!" called the Russian coach.

Up stood Korolenko, stripping off his sweats. His coach massaged him with a pair of gloves, and the dry rasp was audible throughout the gym.

"He's got scales!" came an incredulous whisper from the capitalist side.

The Quasimodo of the moment balked at the edge of the circle, no longer sure of his quarry. "Is eczema contagious?" he was heard to quail. The American trainer assured him that the scruffy corn husk from Siberia had merely peeled in the Cuban sun. But at first touch the American wrung his hand, and, when the Russian clutched him with piggish grunts, he screamed as if impaled.

"That ain't skin!" he appealed with a forlorn look to the side. "This guy's an alligator."

The referee spoke mostly Japanese but understood screams. He motioned Koroenko close for examination.

"He's been fibreglassed," the American clamored, indicating the rows of abrasions on his torso. "I ain't wrestling no pineapple."

By this time both teams had edged forward in bilingual outrage. The official, who refrained from touching the specimen, suddenly straightened and announced in Oriental English, "No-o foe-lin sub-stints." He then chopped the air smartly with both hands, bidding the bout resume, and, when the American gingerly donned his jacket and savagely denounced his foe as a "Communist cactus," the beleaguered ref declared a forfeit.

Smerdyakov shrugged and sat down opposite the American coach at the scorers' table to fill out another protest.

And so it went the first week until the Olympic Committee, as a sign of helplessness, convened a private meeting of the two antagonists at the Havana Libre Hotel.

Sherman, more tweed than ever, his skin a deeper-below-ground skin than before, and inhabiting a blue blazer he had not climbed out of for thirty-six hours, appeared first. Smerdyakov dallied psychologically long at a nearby coffee shop but showed up equally worn, his fat and flexible face delivered of cherubic charm, a post-pregnancy landscape, rilled, jellied. The two of them faced each other across the polished table, regarding each other's lapel pins.

"Gentlemen," began the wise old Olympic patriarch sitting peripherally to them. "we are all sorely tried. . . ."

Whatever else he said was inconsequential. Smerdyakov knew it. Sherman knew it. The two other Executive Committee members knew it. The grinning Cuban who seemed to have wandered in by mistake knew it: Each loathed the transcultural experience of an old man's speech. They had not come to be assuaged. They had come to cross swords, to bleed, and then—if enough blood of the right color was spilled—to bury.

"On behalf of the United States," Sherman flickered to life at the proper moment, "and for the sake of the integrity of the Games, I demand gene scans of the following Soviet entries: Ivan Spadunka, center—"

"Spadunka!"

"... center forward, Soviet basketball team," Sherman overrode Smerdyakov's dismay.

"We'll trade you a gene scan of Spadunka for a gene scan of the humanoid you call Stilt!"

"... and of pole vaulters Olka K. and Mikhail C.," Sherman continued undaunted, "discus thrower Pyotr I. —"

"Inber or Izmaylov?"

"The one with the cast-iron forearms."

"All our field athletes have fine supinator and pronator development," declared Smerdyakov.

"Then I want scans of all of them."

"And what do you expect to find? Evidence of chemical synthesis?"

"You wouldn't be that clumsy."

Smerdyakov laughed smugly. A laugh deep inside the neck and shoulders. Internal peep show.

"We suspect they are *chimeras*," Sherman said slowly. "Reaggregated genes you've somehow controlled at the blastocyst stage—four parents, eight parents, whatever, pick and choose . . ."

"Ab-surd!" A touch too much anger. Smerdyakov attempted to cover it with reckless scorn. "Eight parents! Of course. Eight models of mediocrity instead of two. Makes sense. Something from nothing, yes, Shuer-mann? If you find the genetic model for this kind of development in anyone's ancestors, I'll be glad to call Inber and Izmaylov home myself. Why not? We can simply enter their parents!"

"No, we won't find the right genetic model," Sherman agreed. "But we should be able to prove that their gene scans don't meet any possible permutations of the gene scans of any human parents you produce."

Smerdyakov began thumping the table. "Proof, proof, proof, Shuer-mann! None of this guilt by omission of evidence. Would your capitalist justice admit such foolishness? Where is the sire for this genetic cir-

cus you accuse us of?"

"Popeye!" Sherman blurted sarcastically.

"Pup-eye?" Smerdyakov blinked. "Who is Pup-eye?"

"We aren't dealing with legalities," said Sherman. "We're dealing with Olympic admissibility."

"Who is Pup-eye?" Smerdyakov asked the patriarch.

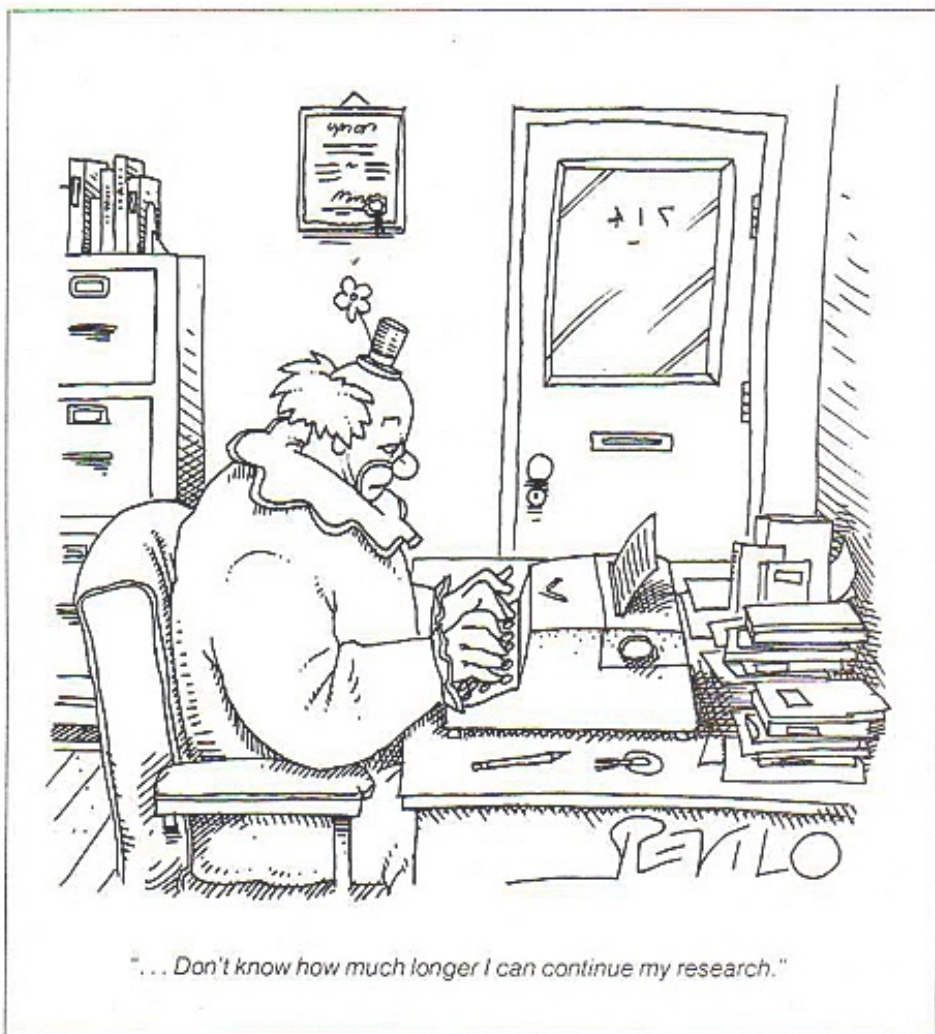
"Pop-eye," that august being informed him.

"Pope-eye," the Cuban was heard to repeat with inner amusement.

Smerdyakov looked concerned. The Popeye. Could it be the English equivalent of the actual sources they had used?

"... and unless convincing genealogies are forthcoming for all the entrants under question, they must be disqualified and stripped of their medals," Sherman was concluding.

"Genealogies?" Smerdyakov sopranoed. "The American neurotic wants us to have pedigrees! Incredible. First he invents an army of mutations, insulting the flower of Soviet youth; then he finds an ancestor for them—this . . . this mysterious Poop-eye, who probably exists only in imperialist folklore; and now . . . now he takes it upon himself to strip us of our medals! Curiously he makes no mention of Soviet protests. But I too have a list." He waved the paper loose



"... Don't know how much longer I can continue my research."

from his jacket pocket. "Fencers whose arms are longer than their legs, water polo players with dewclaws who secrete oil like seals, and this goalie of theirs they call Pon-toon! No need to go on. No need to tell you about the phone call to Spadunka at 3 A.M. announcing that his pregnant wife, Vera, had been arrested naked on a statue of Lenin in Novgorod. No need to mention the anonymous gifts our athletes receive—radios that don't turn off, an ant farm with a secret exit! No, I merely ask that the Americans on my list be suspended from further competition until their gene scans are also approved. We look for Poop-eyes, too!"

Sherman snapped his fingers. "The medal count, Felix."

"Gold: twenty-eight/twenty-eight. Silver: sixteen/eleven. Ihem. Bronze: twenty-three/twenty-two, us. That's without any protests upheld, of course."

"And without the fifteen hundred free, which is in the bag," Sherman stirred a lime rickey and eyed the swimming pool on TV. He had given up troubleshooting on the front line and turned his hotel suite into a nerve center with five phones and a television after finding out his blood was nectar to Cuban mosquitoes. "How does it figure if all the protests are upheld, Felix?"

Man Friday sighed like a steamed lobster. "Just about a dead heat in gold and silver. They might edge us in bronze."

"Nobody looks at bronze. The way I see it, when all the dust settles today, this fifteen hundred will be the difference. That's the way I see it. You see it that way, Felix?"

"I don't know, sir. The Russians haven't seen Thompson swim yet. They might protest. I..."

A long pause brought Sherman's glance. "What?"

"Isn't that Smerdyakov, sir?"

"Where?"

"There. Back of the starting blocks."

Sherman leaned close enough to count the electronic dots on the TV, several of which, it seemed to him, did approximate the silly-putty face of Giorgi Smerdyakov.

"That no-good-nik. That crummy Commie!" Sherman felt a transcendental tingle flowing down the back of his neck. Euphoria before death. Thompson was the last sure thing the United States had. If they couldn't pull this out before tomorrow, it meant losing. An eternity of losing for him. He saw himself as the final contestant, acknowledging defeat at cocktail parties, vaguely introduced, shunned, whispered about—"That's Sherman; he blew it in Havana."

Sherman arrived bloodless at the natorium but managed to stroll casually through the press of dewed flesh and crisp white linen on the deck. The pool was a caldron of warm-up; the officials were trying to organize back-up timers behind the automatic touch-pads. Smerdyakov regarded his approach with cynicism.

"Giorgi-iii!" Sherman affected. "I just had

to see you to tell you I'm glad we got that awful protest meeting behind us. It was a chance to get rid of our frustrations, eh? And now it's the next-to-last day of competition and all is forgiven—the committee has forgotten us, the athletes have done their thing, the spirit of the Games has come through, eh, Giorgi?"

Smerdyakov sucked his lips into a thoughtful moue.

"Oh, come now," Sherman laughed adolescently. "We've done our jobs. We should just sit back and let things happen."

Smerdyakov continued to inhale his lips until one of the freestylers flip-turned and laid a wave at their feet.

"Hey!" Sherman said as they backed away. "Guess what. I just came from the diving annex, where I withdrew our protest against your diver, Baba... Babalus... the one that looks like a flying squirrel."

"The one that took fifth?" Giorgi smiled.

"Fifth? Oh, did he? Fifth, he took. Well, he might move up if there are any other pro-

So far as they could tell, the Soviet was a ballroom dancer. He glided, bowed, dipped, and occasionally peppered his opponents with pretty but ineffectual volleys. . . . He had the brittle features of a ballerina.

tests. Anyway, we thought it was time to—uh, in fact... in fact, we've been thinking of withdrawing all our protests. Of course, that could only be part of a mutual gesture."

Someone kicked into the wall. Aquatic thunder. A waiting teammate launched off the block. Slap! The sound seemed to fit the sting on Smerdyakov's face. "Eat spinach," he said.

Sherman's eyelids fluttered. "No need to get vulgar, Giorgi—"

"Eat spinach, Poop-eye. You see, we have our sources. The Soviet-American Cultural Society in Armenia traced down your imperialist mythology. We are not stupid. And we can keep medal counts as well as you. I suppose you think we will just overlook this... this amphibian Thompson of yours. The one who doesn't warm up. The one with the special shoes—he appears to have very few bones below the ankles, Shuer-mann."

"Thompson? Thompson. The one with osteogenesis of the feet?"

"Quite select of the disease, wouldn't you say? And another thing, we are told he doesn't breathe during the race. Is that so,

Shuer-mann? For fifteen hundred meters he doesn't breathe? Even amphibians breathe, though often through a blowhole in the top of the head."

"He breathes very rapidly, Giorgi. I swear it. And his mouth is unusually elastic. He can catch air with the slightest turn."

"How remarkable. We will be filming the race to see."

They sat on deck chairs twenty feet apart behind the timers. When the pool was cleared and the officials readied, the championship heat was marshaled to the blocks. Thompson, aided by teammates on either side, and wearing footgear resembling calf-length ski boots, doddered to lane 4. The long, limp appendages that emerged from the boots could have been windsocks or, as Smerdyakov said with a lustrous grin, albino galoshes. Hardly less intriguing to the Russian was Thompson's topknot. Except for a circular thicket at the crown of his head, the swimmer was smoothly bald.

"Amphibians!" Smerdyakov called sprightly, tapping the top of his head.

Soviet cameras rolled.

The Last Day.

Thompson's world-record performance was under protest. The Olympic Committee procrastinated. Someone had sent Smerdyakov seven Popeye comics and a package of frozen spinach. The mosquitoes around Sherman fed.

Sherman was watching a replay of the final equestrian event, grand prix jumping. Uncle Sam had another gold—temporarily. Fool's gold. "It's down to the boxing, Felix," he said. "Look at that nag. She doesn't jump, she hops. Should've been destroyed. Would you let a protest like that go by? It's down to the boxing, Felix."

One of the phones rang. Felix answered. "Smerdyakov," he said.

Sherman took the phone and clamped it on his head like a hot compress. "Hello, Popeye," he said wearily.

"How dare you call that animal a horse!" screamed Smerdyakov.

"It's got four legs and a tail, doesn't it? That qualifies it in the Soviet stable."

"Shuer-mann. We want that creature x-rayed!"

"Sorry. The race was over two hours ago. She's dead."

"Dead?" Smerdyakov's frayed voice cracked.

"Broke a leg on the way back to the stable. Had to shoot her."

"Remarkable! An autopsy will do."

"Already buried."

"We will exhume the beast."

"Cremated. We buried the urn."

"Really, Shuer-mann—"

"You can autopsy yours, though."

"Ours?"

"The thing that took the silver—a rump, a tail, sort of a head? The one we are protesting. He's dead, right?"

"... of course."

"Thought so. We figured one of your cos-

sacks spurred him to death."

"Very funny. He died of natural causes. We put him on a plane that crashed in your Bermuda Triangle."

"It's been nice talking to you."

"Nice talking to you, Shuer-mann. How are your mosquito bites?"

"Fine. How are your Popeye comics?"

"Excellent. This Bluto—ha, ha. Well ... goodbye."

"Goodbye, Popeye."

Sherman handed the phone to Man Friday. "It's down to the boxing, Felix," he said.

He thought it was fitting that the final distillation of the brotherhood of nations in friendly competition should be two guys in the ring trying to beat each other's brains out. Even with headgear the heavyweights could deliver mickey fins. And the American boy had dynamite hands. So far as they could tell, the Soviet was a ballroom dancer. He glided, bowed, swept, dipped, and occasionally peppered his opponents with pretty but ineffectual volleys. His boxing was elegant, but no one had seen him take a punch in the qualifying matches. He had the brittle features of a ballerina. Well-scrubbed. Cleanly sculpted eyes. A porcelain jaw. Sherman got on the phone to the team manager at the arena. "The head, Bronson," he said. "Make sure he goes to the head. He can't outbox the man. He's got to put his lights out." Bronson let Sherman know how much he appreciated the interference, and the two men barked goodbye.

But he needn't have bothered to call. The kid chugged out of his corner at the bell like a wind-up toy. For the first round he pummeled, lambasted, and blasted. The Russian flitted and flicked. It couldn't last. Round 2 saw the American lash, beat, strike, cuff, and buffet. Solid hits. Crushing hits. The brittle nose became a Chuckle. But, except for that, the Soviet boxer seemed completely undaunted. He danced the same blithe dance, scored the same powdery tattoos, even stared the same serene stare. "He's been hypnotized," the Americans complained. A short but profound conversation with the Russian convinced the ref otherwise. Monotonously the American's assault continued. He smote. He thwacked. He thumped, thrashed, drubbed, pelted, and trounced. Finally he FLOGGED and SCOURGED his sashaying enemy, gloves whipping like windmills, then minnow tails, then dropping to his sides. ... In came the feminine taps. Down went the American, physically and emotionally exhausted, crying and clutching the great Isadora's knees.

"I don't believe it," Sherman murmured.

"I'll deliver the protest in person," Felix said, reaching for the attaché case.

The phone calls came late in the day. One to Smerdyakov, one to Sherman, informing them that all protests had been upheld.

"All?" said Sherman. "But that's inconceivable!"

"What kind of Poop-eye Olympics is this?" choked Smerdyakov.

Stunned, they slumped in their separate chairs in separate suites.

"How could they uphold every protest?" Sherman said to himself. "I thought they might turn them all down, but uphold them? How could they uphold every protest? How could they?"

Felix dragged in twenty minutes later with a torn computer printout of the complete international protest results and medal redistribution. "Every major country with a genetic-development program ...," he tried to begin, and then let the paper fall into Sherman's lap.

Sherman felt his hair going white as he read. He was looking into his grave. "Twenty-eighth?" he whispered hoarsely. "We finished twenty-eighth?"

"Tied with the Soviet Union," said Felix.

"Sri Lanka? Sri Lanka won?"

"Just ahead of Liechtenstein."

The phone rang.

"Shuer-mann," came soothingly over the line. "My dear Shuer-mann, we are ruined." Smerdyakov vented a few tight sobs. "Forgive me, Duncan. May I call you Duncan? I know your pain is great, too. What are we to do?"

Sherman choked, swallowed. "The first thing I'm going to do," he announced unsteadily, "is to open the windows of this

room and let all the mosquitoes in. Then I'm going to take off my clothes and lie down on the bed ..."

"Ah, Duncan ... no."

"... and if I'm still alive in the morning, I'm going to shave off my beard, buy a ticket for a public flight, and go back to my farm in Virginia."

"I wish it were so easy for me, Duncan. They will take away my car, my apartment, my free tickets to the Bolshoi. ... Do you think ... do you think the American embassy in Havana might—uh, might ...?"

"They would be very glad to see you, Giorgi. Very glad. Just don't mention my name, and they will be very glad to see you."

"Yes, yes, I understand. And do you think you might need a farmhand—that is, I'm very good at developing hybrids—"

"No question about it, Giorgi. No question ... well, one question."

"Anything, comra—er, Duncan."

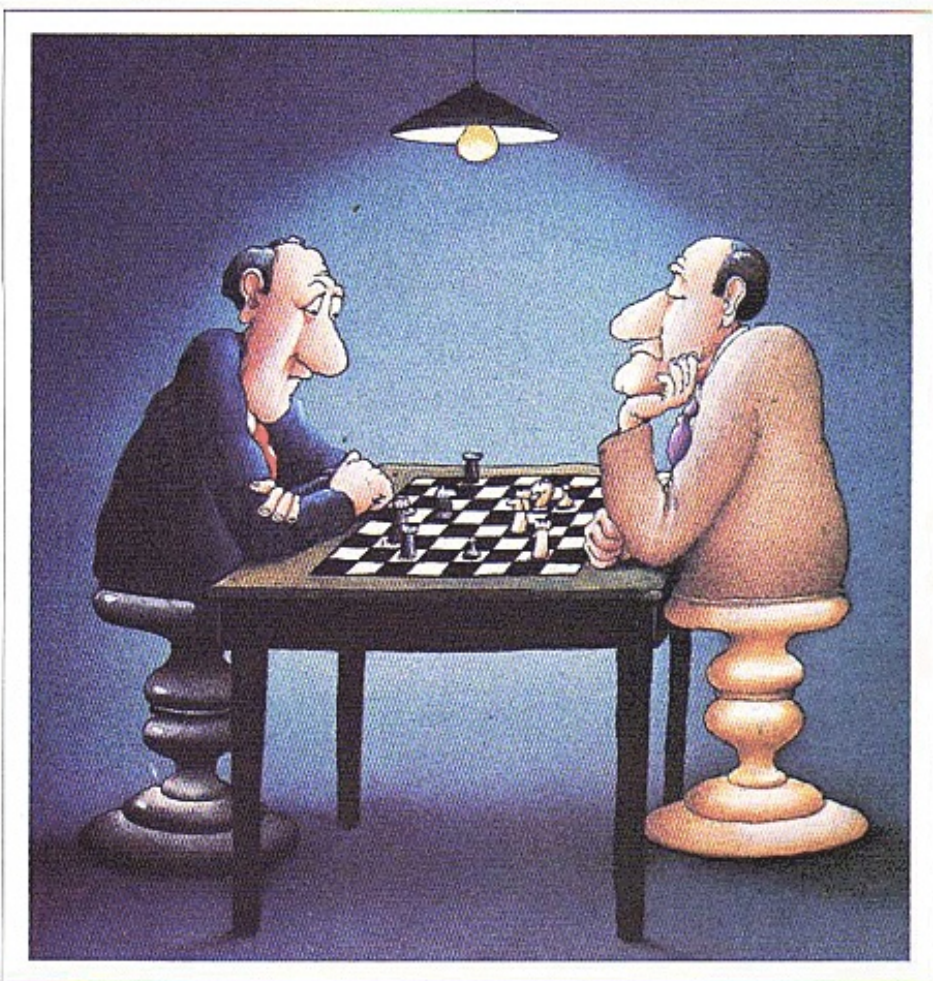
"How the hell did your boy take so much punishment in that fight today? He was like a thumb puppet in there. I thought he was getting his brains knocked out."

Giorgi sighed. "A thumb puppet. Not bad. A thumb puppet has no brains, yes? Not in his head, yes? Kuchka has no brains in his head, either."

"Giorgi. You didn't. But where ...?"

"You didn't see him sit down, did you?"

"Ah, Giorgi, Giorgi," Sherman chuckled. "See you in Virginia." ∞



*She was held by a force
beam and bending over her was one
of the members of the Mindpod.*

TIME WARP

BY THEODORE STURGEON

He was sleek and he was furry; he was totally amphibious, and Althair the Adventurer was what he really was. However, he was known, on his lovely planet Ceer, as Althair the Storyteller just because he did that better—better even than adventuring, at which he was a marvel.

His people called his planet "Ceer, the planet indetectable," and that it really was. It had no smoke or factories, machines or jails or presidents; just uncommanded beauty made of waves and wilderness. It had a kind of shrub-tree plant that would yield to mental pressure and produce the living living-shelters, cupping coolness by day and hoarding heat at night.

A heavy planet, Ceer, with strong inhabitants, who had still stronger minds—so strong that with a ceremony they had linked their minds together and created an integument, a kind of shell, a shield around their worlds that bent all outside rays and

gravities. Reflecting and occulting nothing, it concealed the planet's mass, and more: concealed its absence; yet the peopled plains and oceans could see the friendly stars unhampered. The peoples' name was Zado.

Story time! Story time! Slithering, lithe, surfing, sliding, inchworming, crackly-whiskered, beady-bright, soft, smooth and shining, came the young, the pups and pammies gathering round. Story time! Story time!

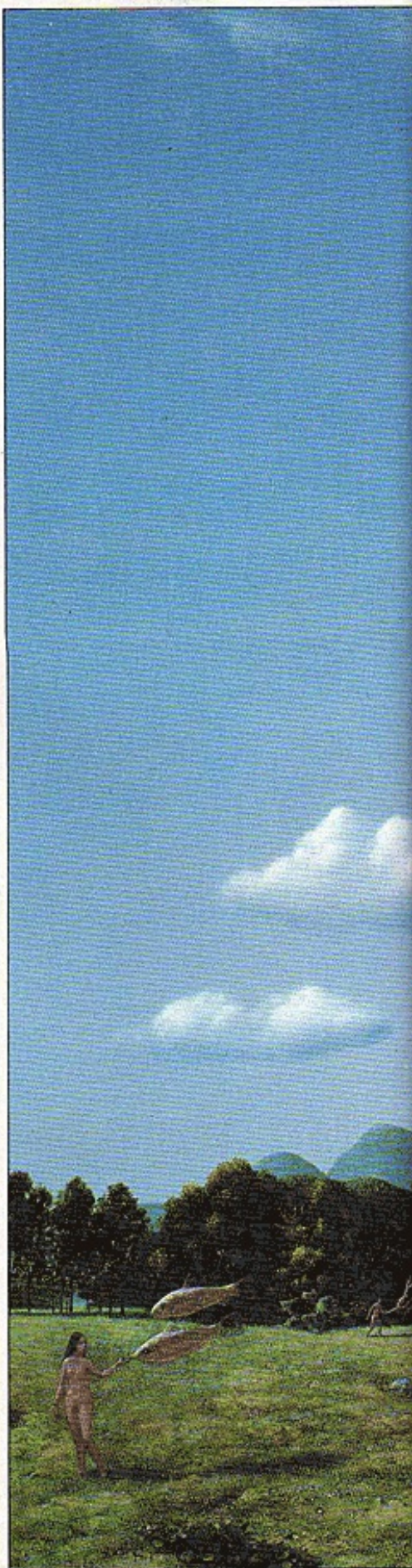
Althair, a tower in a sea excited, waited out the shouldering, scrabbling, let-me-near silencing, until at last they did all the waiting.

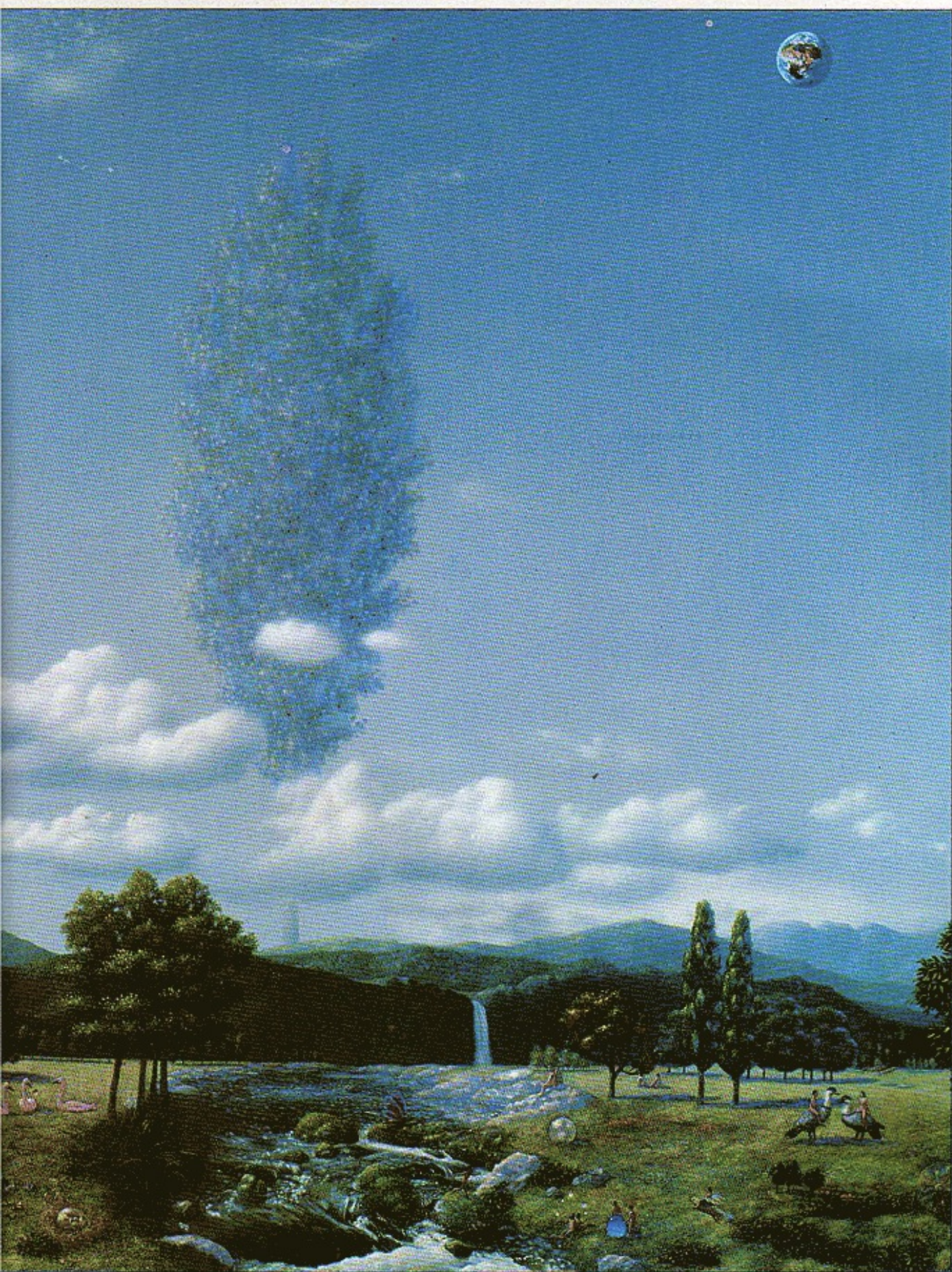
"Today, I will tell you (Althair began) of the planet Orel and the horror that happened there; but first I must tell you about a pup and pammie older than yourselves who were just about as big as me, and lived on a planet with the name Earth. Their names were Will Hawkline and Jonna Verret" (There was a clatter of chattering giggles as the little Zados tried to say the funny names and could not. Althair let them try, then raised his head.

They shushed.)

"Will Hawkline and Jonna Verret lived on an island renamed Avalon, which they had made beautiful and kept beautiful, and saw hardly at all for their working. Will was very important being Coordinator of the Time Center, which means he said what to do and everybody did it.

PAINTING BY CLIFF McREYNOLDS





From the painting by Cliff McReynolds © 1977, Pomegranate Publications

Jonna was the best test pilot he had, which means when Time Center built something, she tried it out. Way down deep Will was angry at Jonna, though he never said it and maybe didn't know it. He wished for a test pilot bigger and older than he was, so he could tell him what to do and see him do it. Jonna was younger and smaller and she was a pammie, but good is good and there's no arguing that. So he was angry because she was a pammie, and she was the best in the world at what she did. (Althair boomed along with the chattering chuckles. It certainly was funny.)

There were lots of other people on Avalon, of course, but they're not really in this story, except for Little Johns. Now the Little Johns were very special. You see, Earth people were slowpokes; so they built things called computers that could logic much faster than they could. The first Little John had the strange ability to think himself into a computer, or think the computer into himself. So he could then do create/computing almost as well as a Zado—as long as he was linked to a computer. Without a computer he was just another slowpoke. So they cloned him a dozen times, creating a dozen Little Johns.

That's what the Time Center was all about—to stop Earth from being a slowpoke. When they wanted to go to another star, they could get inside a big metal jug and fly it in real-time, which took so long they had to go to sleep until they got there a long time later. Then when they got back to Earth the same way, all their friends were long ago dead of old age. Or, they could get into a different kind of jug and fly to the star faster than light, and not have to go to sleep for hundreds of lifetimes; but when they got back, time had still passed on Earth and their friends had still died off. Earth time and jug time were just too different.

But Will Hawklane, with the help of his computers and his people and the Little Johns, Will Hawklane did it! He found a way to separate time from space-time, so his little jugs could go back a little way in time while they went forward a long way in space—all at once! That way space travelers could go away to a star and come back again, while the people they loved were still alive to welcome them and listen to their stories. I know that's a long funny way to solve a problem, but then they weren't Zados, and you have to admire them. Jonna Verret tested the new little jugs—scouts is the Earth name for them—and they worked, and because they worked a terrible thing happened. And now I will tell you about Mindpod, and Orel.

No one knows when or where it came from, but a great dark jug landed on the planet Orel, and in it were 26 things, alive and awful, which together are called Mindpod. Zados are not the only ones in the universe who can link minds, but unlike us, the Mindpod used their linkage as a weapon.

Orel was a wild place where the biggest animal was a meercath, a lizard with thick quick hind legs and small deft hands, bigger than me, with a toothy mouth that could take off my head, and a mind just good enough to feed and be happy. In a *blip!* the Mindpod had those meercaths' minds, and all they would do forever after was to make weapons and go off to other worlds to kill and destroy. Nothing could ever give them back their own minds. A meercath commanded by the Mindpod is a terrible thing. And there were enough worlds within reach of the Mindpod's big dark jug—the Earth word for it is *cruiser*—that the Mindpod itself could rest safely on Orel for a very long time, and take other worlds that take other worlds and Oh! (Oh! cried the young ones. Oh! they wept.)

The Mindpod cruiser had in it all sorts of structures and inventions that could do things that the Mindpod could not—they were rather like Earth people that way, but not at all funny. They had feeler things and

●Attention Time Center: You have one complete revolution of your planet to prepare all records of your experiments and to have yourselves and the records ready for pickup.●

listening things and find-out things so that they knew right away what had happened when Jonna tested the back-in-time jug, the little one she called a scout. That made the Mindpod afraid. When the Mindpod was afraid it was immediately very, very angry. It knew how to travel in zero time, but it didn't know how to travel back in time; so the Mindpod sent a cruiser toward Earth to steal and destroy.

On Avalon, in Time Center Control, Jonna had just come in from the last of her flights. She stood proud and happy, happy because she had done everything right, happy for Will too, because it was truly a great thing he had done. Will Hawklane looked at her, how she stood smiling, her hair a bright tumble, her eyes pleased and giving. Just for a moment his regret that she was a pammie and not a bigger and older pup grew smaller and he smiled and took her hand.

At that moment the very walls boomed with a terrible voice:

Attention Time Center: You have one complete revolution of your planet to prepare all records of your experiments and to have yourselves and the records ready for

pickup. One hour later Planet Detonation will occur, whether or not you are planet-side.

Will Hawklane, still holding Jonna's hand though he had quite forgotten it, bawled, "Little John!"

Immediately Little John Five stepped up—a big Earth person, strong as a Zado, with close golden hair and eyes very wide apart. Will Hawklane cried, "I have done a terrible thing, but—how could I know? Who are they? What do they want? Can they do what they say?"

The large growing eyes closed, and now the Little John was one with the big computer and its instant logic and immense memory. He said, "Subspace waketrace indicates that they came in zero time from OREL—Orion Remote Earthtype Landbase. Who they are: No data, except that they are not indigenous to Orel. Can they do what they say? All relevant data indicate that they can, to a probability of 99 point eleven nines. Could you have known? You could not. What do they want? Clearly, it is the back-in-time scout device, if they had it they would have used it, and would have struck before our tests.

"But if we don't give it to them, they'll blow us up anyway, and then they'll never have it.

"Which indicates they are afraid of it. If they can't have it, no one will have it.

"Then they've given us the answer!" When Will Hawklane made up his mind, he did it altogether. If they're afraid of it, we'll use it. We'll arrive on Orel before they leave and stop them." He turned to Harper Townsend, his chief of operations. "Harper—are both scouts ready for launch?" At his nod, "Jonna—are you willing to take a Little John and go to Orel, while I take the other scout and rendezvous with you before they attack?"

Her face told him how ready and willing she was.

"Then let's go! Harper, put every computer on the problem of destroying that cruiser—but don't make a move until the last minute, or they'll strike before the deadline."

He sprinted toward the launch gate and only then realized he was still holding Jonna's hand—he almost pulled her off her feet. "Sorry..." he said and was gone. She looked sadly at her hand. "Sorry?" she said, then turned and ran for her own scout, shouting for Little John Twelve.

And you know, by the time they were in their scouts, the Little Johns and the computers had worked out every single figuring they needed to make the trip back in time, forth in space, to Orel before the Mindpod cruiser left.

At that very moment, on the place in the dark cruiser where the devices that made it go were—the Earth word is *bridge*—a meercath left his face of blinking lights and came to the commander. "There are stowaways, sir." (That's the way they talk in jugs. And a stowaway is a person who gets on a jug or whatever they call them, without

anyone knowing.) "Stowaways, sir. I thought at first there were three, then it seemed like four. Anyway, it's certainly two."

"Start a search then," the commander said. "Every compartment, room, pathway." The meercath went away, and another one called out, "Small craft leaving the planet, sir." But even as they fixed their look-at thing on it and spit fire, the scout slipped into faster-than-light and was lost to them. Just then another appeared, and a great fan of flame swept out from the Orel-ian cruiser and sliced off a tail section just before this scout flung itself into faster-than-light and also escaped the attack.

None of us could possibly know what it's like to fly out in one of those little scouts. Acceleration squeezes you backward until you can't breathe anymore and you can't see anything right or really think straight, and all of a sudden there's a great bloom of light, a spinning spiral, and you're in another universe full of gray shapes that make you dizzy when you look at them. In time—how much time depends how far in real-space you are going—you're back in this universe, blinking at a whole different set of stars, with a strange planet floating nearby. Terrifying.

But for Will Hawklane it was infinitely worse. Seconds before they slipped into faster-than-light, "We're hit!" Little John Five cried out, and Will Hawklane said, "Too bad, but we're counting down and we're going out anyway!" At that, the bloom of light spiraled around them and they were in the gray place, and—*crunch-ring-blanc*—things broke in the scout's insides. Their lights went out and flared bright and dim again. "Damage report," Will Hawklane ordered, and the Little John told him a long list of awful things. "Can you get a fix on Jonna?" And that was worst of all.

"She's on Orel—on the surface!"

"Captured," Will Hawklane whispered, and oh, he had a feeling inside himself he didn't know he could feel. "She's alive though," he almost said, almost asked. "She's alive," said the Little John. "But they are doing something to her."

Oh yes they were doing something to her. She was flat out under a force-beam with a fearful light shining on and through her, and bending over her was one of the actual members of the Mindpod, and I can't tell you what it looked like because no one's told me, except that it was horrible beyond description so that even if I could I wouldn't. And it said:

"We have placed a substance in your bloodstream which will kill you in a very special way. There is an antidote, but after a certain time it will become ineffective, and you will stay locked in a world of visions so dreadful that you will die of your own free will to escape them. So quickly now: answer my questions. What was the mission? What kind of work was going on at your Time Center? Who were you trying to contact when we captured your scout?"—question, question, question.

Jonna lay there and spoke only once:

"Little John Twelve was right." And then she wouldn't explain. For when the tractor beam from Orel took them, Little John Twelve said to her quietly, talking the way Little Johns do, "The probability of escape is negligible. My ability to refuse the information they will demand, not only of me, but of the entire contents of our computer banks, is equally negligible. There is therefore only one reasonable course. It has been nice knowing you, Jonna Verret," whereupon he smiled slightly and died.

She remembered wondering through her shock and fear what it must be like to be a clone among clones. He was as real as she was, yet dying could hardly be the same thing, for all the Little Johns had complete access to everything Twelve had ever done or thought or felt; so in a way he would live on in all of them, more than a memory.

Now, helpless under the light, his words rang in her mind: "There is therefore only one reasonable course..." and she closed her eyes. But she didn't know how to die this way, and she did not know—yet—if she really wanted to.

And the light burned on, and the questions rained down, and it seemed that the podmember's face (if that could indeed be a face) grew larger and larger until it filled the room, the planet, and the endless space outside, and its wet pores grew into caves and from them came dripping horrors with pointed, poisoned teeth and sounds more ghastly than any sight;

sounds rising growlhowl scream shriek, and loud and more and huge and new worse sights ashake, ashudder and tearing apart with the noise absolute, and all at once dead quiet so sudden it was agony, and in a dim radiance stood Will Hawklane smiling, smiling at last right at her, his eyes captured by hers, his hand out, his arms out, and, and, a spear of white metal striking up from somewhere, entering his breast and emerging scarlet from the top of his head, and oh, his look of complete astonishment as she screamed at last, then all was dark, then she was gone...

"Gone," said Little John Five in the scout with Will Hawklane. "She's gone."

Never knowing Jonna's last, most terrible illusion, Will Hawklane asked, out of a dry throat, "What do you mean, gone?"

"No sign now from Orel, not from her..." Are you well? Your breathing stopped." It started again with a great shudder. The Little John said, "And yet I have her life signals... no this can't be. This is not in my data banks."

"What? What?"

"The life signals come from another place... not Orel at all, but nowhere else either. No chart or survey or probe has ever reported anything but emptiness just there. And yet—I get her sign."

"Pull out of this into real-space, and set a course, and go there, wherever she is," Will cried harshly.

"But Orel... the cruiser... the detona-



tion of Earth—

"Five, I order you." And the Little John obeyed, saying only, "You know we're damaged," and did the things necessary to fling them into the real. A moment's observation and the Little John had set the new course and flung them spiraling into the gray. "You still get signs?"

"Naturally not."

"What do you mean naturally not?"

"Forward in space, backward in time," the Little John said. "Have you forgotten? She will not have arrived there yet. Wherever 'there' is."

Off they went then, back in time, forward in space, until they emerged; and there, where all the data banks everywhere said there was nothing, was a planet in orbit around a distant star—distant enough and so erratically aflame that there had never been (would be) a reason to look for perturbations. They stared at the world in wonder until Will Hawklane said, "It's molten. The planet's molten!"

"Yes, it's newborn."

"We've come *that far back*?" And the Little John answered, "We're damaged."

"Orbit in close," said Will Hawklane, "and speed up our time." Reluctantly the scout responded and they watched in fascination the agonies of a molten ball becoming a world, its heaving throes and spouts of lava, gouts of flame and writhes of color as the strata turned up edgewise and sank again; then a nearly endless time of clouds and fireflickers, and the emergence of land and oceans, land that stayed, land that sank, oceans roaring across land newly alive with grasses just invented.

And at last the beauty came and calm—isthmus and estuary making firm agreements with the island-dotted sea, and life flourishing at last, sure and powerfully evolving. And for Will, a growing sense of presence, of a newer kind of mind, strong and gentle and sane and fearless. "Do you feel it?"

"Feel what?" And by what, Will Hawklane knew that a Little John, for all his mental powers, could not feel certain things.

Then, together, they gasped.

It was—gone. The planet vanished! All about them the stars shone, the distant sun flamed, but this world was gone.

Because he felt what he felt, Will Hawklane said, "Tighten your orbit. Move in closer."

"Orbit around what? Closer to *what*? There's nothing there anymore! I can't see it, my instruments can't see it..." Will Hawklane had never seen a Little John so upset. But he could feel the emanations of Mind close by, and he smiled and said, "Pretend it's still there, and go down."

Obediently the Little John did it. Nothing, and nothing, and *ah*.

And of course you know where they were, and when. They had witnessed the birth of our dear Ceer, and the beginnings of our shield, and had now passed inside it and were filled with wonder.

"Her signs! Her signs! She's alive here!"

The Little John was really excited: amazing! And just then the scout gave a sickening lurch and Will himself overrode the computerized controls and summoned his old skill as a pilot—trained to manage these flying things with his own two hands. He righted it, but lost a great deal of altitude, and the scout apparently disliked his firmness because it fought back and set up a great grinding clatter from somewhere inside it. "Where is she?" he shouted over the noise.

"Over there, right at the base of the peninsula! But there's a mountain..."

Will Hawklane saw it, then lost it in the rush of clouds and rain that swept down on it. He turned toward where he thought Jonna was.

"Climb! Climb!"

"Climb she won't," Will said grimly. "Anyway, I don't see any mountain now," which was perfectly true. As if insulted, the mountain reached up a high crag, or seemed to, and gouged out a slit a third of the way

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down the hull, throwing the nose of the scout almost straight up. Through the slit, which stopped just under his feet, he got a split-second glimpse of the peninsula and a wide flat meadow. As the nose came down he swung it that way. The scout tilted to the left and wouldn't correct, and they came in like that, skittered and slid, nose down, up and over, and it was all black everywhere and quiet.

The first thing Will Hawklane saw as he came out of the blackness was something he couldn't believe.

Me.

The next thing he knew was that the warm pillow under his head spoke to him: "Will . . . Oh Will, are you all right?" It had Jonna Verret's voice because the pillow was Jonna Verret's lap. He tipped his head back and looked at her and then again at me, and tried to sit up and scrabble backwards at once. I think he was afraid. Maybe my teeth. Jonna said, "It's all right, Will. That's Althair. He pulled you out of the scout."

"What was left of it," said the Little John. Will saw him sitting on the floor nearby. He had a bump over one eye but seemed well

otherwise. They were in what Will thought was a polished wooden cave. Well, what would you think if you'd never seen one of our living living-places before?

Anyway, you never heard such a flurry of questions in your life, and if it hadn't been for Little John Five sitting there nodding his big golden head every now and then, I don't think Will Hawklane would have believed a word of it. He had to know all about Ceer and us Zados, and the shield we thought up around our planet, and why we have no machines, and how we grow living-places and see far and move to other worlds when we want to, without jugs.

"The Zados took me away from the Mindpod on Orel," Jonna told him. "Right out from under a force-beam. They brought me here and stopped the poison the Mindpod had put into my blood and made me well all over, even my head." And Will had to believe it, because she was here. But when I tried to explain how by making where she was the only place in the universe she couldn't be (so she disappeared) and Ceer the only place in the universe she could be, he couldn't understand it. Slowpokes think *tools*, you see. When they want to do something, the first thing they look for is something outside of themselves to do it with; tools, machines, inventions. They can do a lot with tools, but that kind of thinking keeps them from doing things the simple way, which is why they are slowpokes. What makes them so funny is that they don't have to be slowpokes, and they just are.

Will Hawklane was very, very bright; you have to understand that. He had to be, to have become Coordinator of his Time Center on Avalon while still so young. As I told you, that is a very high place to reach on Earth. But he was bright in a way that made things a lot more difficult than they had to be. He never stopped asking questions, which is a fine thing in itself, but when he couldn't understand the answers, he wanted to stop and work at it, and found it very hard just to accept and go on. We can do certain things, we Zados. We had proved it to him. But it was very uphill for him to use what we could do without knowing how it worked, and without tools and inventions to test all the parts. Acceptance is the big word. Acceptance was very hard for Will Hawklane.

Little John Five was no problem. He could think like a living thinker, but he was conditioned by computers and computers can't think. Computers now—they know the meaning of acceptance. And Jonna . . . well, she was a pammie, and Earth pammies are sort of special, and seem to be able to know a great many things without needing to be told. Acceptance is easier for them.

By this time, of course, I knew all about the terrible things the Pod had done to Jonna on Orel (we had known about the Mindpod by our own mindnet from the moment they landed there, and had been watching) and also about the threat to

Earth. And we had worked out a plan.

To do it, we would have to get into the caves under the big basket—cradle, the Little John called it—which held the Orellian cruiser on the surface of Orel. (Orel is mostly porous under the surface, great chains and tangles of holes and caves.) We could then try to get into the cruiser itself and see what we could do from there.

Getting to Orel was a lot harder than it had to be, mostly owing to Will Hawklane's insistence on understanding everything we did. When I told him that the Zado High Council would convene for the ritual that would take us to Orel, he wanted to know where the council would meet, and I had to explain that it didn't actually meet at any certain place; the mindnet could be cast wherever the Council Zados happened to be. Then I had to tell him what to do with his own mind, which is just—accept. And at first he wouldn't and then he couldn't, and I had a time, I tell you, showing him how he could. I didn't want him to see me laughing, and really that was the hardest part.

I got them all comfortable and convened the High Council and we started to weave the Net that would send us to Orel. And wouldn't you know the moment the Ceer-reality began to fade around us, up pops Will Hawklane, bolt upright, demanding to know what's happening, and of course he broke the net and we had to start all over.

I was going to speak to him but Jonna said, "Let me," and went and sat down beside him. She took both his hands and looked into his eyes and said, "Will—just let it happen. Trust," she said. "Trust. Go with me." And while she held him with her hands and her eyes I quickly convened again. We got a good Net this time. The glowing sound-beds of shimmer lifted us and *blip!* we were in the caves on Orel.

Whatever Will Hawklane or any of them were going to say, they didn't say it. Not so much because of the caves themselves, the crazy light (there are patches of luminescent rock, blue and green, and reddish moss and fungus that glows purple) and the odd smell of the air; none of this. It was the meercath standing there, scratching its belly with one of its little hands. It was wearing a harness with a heat weapon stuck on it. It was the first meercath the Earth folk had ever seen and I guess I don't blame them for being upset. Jonna made a little scream and the Little John opened his big eyes wide, and Will Hawklane slapped a weapon out of his belt and *whssht!* blew the meercath's big head off.

I was not pleased about that. I had never thought to tell them, but I had a shield around us just like the one we put around Ceer, and the meercath never knew we were there. But now that Will Hawklane had used his weapon, the whole planet, or anyway the Mindpod, knew it and knew where we were. I didn't tell him this. Zados do not say things that make anyone unhappy. Will Hawklane was pleased and it was too late to correct what he had done. I took the heat weapon away from the dead meercath and

gave it to Will Hawklane and showed him how to use it, and asked him for his; I told him the Mindpod could find us instantly if it was used again, but the meercath's weapon would be harder to trace.

Then we ran. Oh, we ran! I led them through the caves and into the labyrinth under the cradle, and you know I couldn't create the shield while we were moving that fast. Another meercath saw us and set up that horrible wailing cry, and in a moment it was coming from everywhere. We ran through the green and blue, through patches of purple, and soon there came the bright orange flare of the heat weapons.

At last we were where I wanted us to be, right under the cradle, but it happened to be a blind corridor as well. If the meercaths found us here it would be a bad thing. As long as we were running they would try to bring us down with their heat-things, but if they had us trapped they would catch us and pull us apart and bite. That's the way the Mindpod trained them.

There was only one thing I could do—make a little mindnet and get us out of there. But I would need their help. Joanna and Little John Five seemed to understand right away what I needed—just to relax, give themselves to me and the net—and oh, how I wished Will Hawklane was a little less curious, a little less brave, and maybe a little more stupid! I will give him credit: he tried, but then he saw the meercaths, two, three, then seven, eight, nine of them. I

instantly threw up the shield—I didn't need their help for that—and they could not see us, and in a moment they would have moved on to search somewhere else. But Will Hawklane could see them as clearly as we can see the stars here on Ceer, and he raised the meercath heat-thing I had given him and sent a great orange flash down the corridor. Two of the meercaths went down howling, and then they all knew for sure where we were.

Will Hawklane went down on one knee and steadied his weapon, and I thought, "That is the tool-craziest slowpoke in all the Known and Unknown!" I shouted in words and inside their heads to Jonna and the Little John: *give me you!* and they did, and while the meercaths were wading through the horrible mess Will had made in the corridor, I flung the energy they gave me, together with my own, against the soft rocks overhead and a huge section came crashing down, shutting it off.

In the sudden silence and swirling dust I said to Will Hawklane, "Now if you can't do what I ask, don't do *anything!*" as gently as I could. Maybe it was this or maybe the way Jonna and the Little John looked at him, but he became very quiet and almost helpful.

I called on the Ceer net with the precise locus, and as around us the cave faded away, metal walls, flat and dark, took their place. We were inside the Orellian cruiser, and almost before we could take a breath,



we had that crazy spinning spinning-out feeling of space travel, zero time. The cruiser had lifted. It was a close thing.

It probably took us a little while to be able to think straight—you pups and pammies will never know what a wringing out you get from traveling that way. Once I got my wits back, I looked around. Flat metal walls. Dark. I made it a little lighter. Jonna and Will were stretched out, I guess still waiting for their minds to catch up with them. Little John Five was sitting up, wagging his big head.

"Five," I said, "can you think-in to the computer on this cruiser?"

He looked at me. If he was surprised to see me shining in the dark he didn't say so. He closed his eyes and made some sort of effort. He opened his eyes and said, "It's different..."

"You have to expect that. But isn't it the same in some ways?"

He closed his eyes again. After a while he nodded his head. "In a lot of ways."

"Can you learn it?"

"I think so."

"You do that, Five. Think-in all the way. Think-in so far that when they start looking for us with their finder-thing, they will think you are another part of their own computer. Can you see out of their see-it thing? I want to know where we are. I'll help," I said.

He tried hard. I picked up what he mind-saw and made it shine on the dark wall. It was like a window. There was a planet.

"My God," I heard behind me, "that's Earth!"

"There's Avalon—see?"

"All right, that's where we are. I would like to know when we are," I said.

"I do not have the referents," the Little John said.

"I do. Look!" Will Hawklane cried out.

In the picture, from the curve of the planet's shoulder, came a tiny golden spark. "A scout," said Jonna Verret. "It's... could it be..."

Across the picture came a line of fire, at almost the exact moment the scout winked out in that special way a craft flares when it slips into faster-than-light. A moment later another spark appeared; the fire speared out and sliced into the tail section just before the ship disappeared. Somehow the faster-than-light change came when it was strangely brighter than the first one.

"It—it's us. Me. They're going to do terrible things to—to her."

I decided to do a kind thing. I used a piece of the net and made it say to Jonna, deeply, "Sleep." And I said to Will Hawklane, "Sleep." They slept. They slept so deeply that even the Mindpod's probes and search-sees wouldn't know they were there. Then I said to the Little John, "Five, they are hidden in a special way, and I can put up my own shield; by now you know how they will search; can you make yourself seem like part of their computer? So much so they will not find you?" He said he could.

Then I told him what to do.

When it was right, I got the net to bring Will Hawklane and Jonna up and up through their deeps until they were normally asleep, and then I woke them.

Immediately Little John Five said, "The computer reports stowaways. A meercath has told the commander."

I said, "That's all right."

The Little John said, "The commander has ordered a search."

I said, "That's all right, too."

Jonna said, "Can we hide somewhere?"

I said I didn't think so—not for long.

Jonna said, "You can't mean for us just to sit here until they come for us!"

"They won't take us without a fight," Will Hawklane said, and he took the meercath heat-thing out of his belt; and wouldn't you know before I could say another word the door of the compartment crashed open and there stood a meercath guard. Will aimed his weapon, but of course nothing happened because I had taken the

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Think-in so far
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charges out while he slept. I had neglected, however, to remove one patch of stupidity or his appalling bravery. As the giant meercath opened his mouth to squall, Will Hawklane flung himself across the compartment and shoved the weapon between all those big teeth and into the meercath's throat. And he didn't stop with that. With the momentum of his rush he placed a hand on the meercath's head and vaulted up and around, clamping his legs above and below the meercath's long snout, forcing its jaws closed. I remembered then that all big lizards, especially the one with long jaws, might have, like a meercath, a bite powerful enough to nip someone my size in two, but the muscles that open the mouth are comparatively weak, and it's easy to hold the mouth closed. So the guard, scrabbling at Will Hawklane with its clever tiny hands, whimpered and died, and sounded no alarm.

Panting and exultant, Will Hawklane came back. "Help me drag this thing inside." Well, I helped him. And I thought, how can I tell him, without making him unhappy, that he had just done the worst possible thing he could do? Zados don't make

people unhappy. How could I tell him that if he had let himself be captured, he would have been taken to the commander on the bridge, where we might be able to do something, but that now he had killed a guard, the other guards would bite his silly brave head off? How could I tell him that the most important thing of all was for the Little John not to be discovered, that he couldn't now be detected except if he were seen, and guards looking for their missing meercath would certainly see him? I couldn't say it. I couldn't say it. He was so smiling and proud.

"Will," I said, trying so hard to be gentle, "see Jonna there." And when he looked I threw the shield around her and she was gone. He gaped and took a step toward where she had been and took the shield away. "See Little John Five." And I threw the shield around Five and then removed it and put it around Will Hawklane. "Will," I said, "you can see Jonna. You can see me. You can see Five. But they can't see you. Is that right, Jonna? Five?" They nodded their heads, and I took down the shield.

"Why are you talking to me as if I were a child?" Will Hawklane asked. So maybe my gentling did not work as well as I thought it would.

I said, "We are going to use the shield. And I want you to understand that no matter how close you come to anyone, they can't see you. No matter how much you want to attack one of them, you must not. We are going out there and find a search party searching, and we are going to put Little John Five into some place they have just searched, because he has work to do and they can't detect him anymore. And then the three of us are going to the bridge where the commander is, and we are going to do it without getting our legs torn off and our heads bitten by them. Do you understand?"

"You're still talking to me as if I were a child," said Will Hawklane.

"Well," I said, "I love children. Let's go."

I opened the door and put up a shield big enough for all of us. We could see no meercaths but we could hear sounds to the left, snuffing and stamping. I waved them to follow (we could see each other inside the shield) and we went that way. Sure enough there was a squad of meercaths right around the corner, opening and closing doors. We stayed close to the wall and moved right down on them, and I don't think the three Earthers really and truly believed in the shield until this moment. One by one the meercaths passed us as we stepped quietly out of their way, until they were gone.

I opened a door. "In you go, Five. Tell me when it's all done."

He smiled. This was the first time I ever saw a Little John smile. "I will," he said and closed the door.

The Little John had given me the cruiser's own computer picture of the big jug, and I had it well in my head. It was huge and a lot more complicated than it had to

be, and it was full of machines and inventions and ups and throughs. And meercaths.

The bridge was way down in the middle of the cruiser with layers and layers of shells within shells all around it that could be sealed off, one from another, in case the big dark cruiser was damaged in space. The bridge was a sort of metal cave all studded with the pictures given it by the computer—pictures from the see-outs, the feel-outs, the how-fasts, how-soons, where-are-we's, and so on—and big ugly meercaths watching them. On a high place in the middle stood the commander, a special meercath, extra big.

Invisible under the shield, we stepped past the guard at the bottom of the ramp up to the high place, and went and stood behind the commander. We watched for a while, how he did the things a commander does to make a cruiser go. Mostly it was sticking out the tummy and looking fierce at one after another of the meercaths who were actually doing something.

From the compartment deep inside the cruiser where we had hidden him, Little John Five mindspoke me: "I'm all finished, Althair." It was a very weary mindspoke.

So I took the shield off Will Hawkline and Jonna Verret. But I kept mine.

You know, it seemed like forever that they stood there in plain sight, not knowing that they could be seen, while the commander strutted back and forth, not knowing they were there. Then one of the meercaths tending the little lights glanced up at the command post, froze for a second, and slowly stood up off his tail. (Meercaths sit on their tails.) Then another glanced, stared, and rose, and another. They began a funny little murmur among them, as if they were afraid to say anything to the commander.

And oh, it seemed like such a long while before the commander thought to look behind him, and there Will Hawkline and Jonna Verret looking him in the eye and smiling, quite used by now to being invisible, and not knowing they were not.

The commander's huge mouth slowly came open, and slowly he raised his little right hand, and he pointed a claw at Jonna. He said, in Earth talk, "You! You! You're the one who disappeared!" And only then did she realize she could be seen. "Althair! Althair!" she cried, but I didn't say anything. Will Hawkline sidled in front of her, maybe thinking he was still invisible, maybe thinking he could protect her or attack the commander, maybe both; but the commander made it clear he could see him too. His pointing claws swung toward Will Hawkline. "You! I saw your picture from Earth. The Time Center... you're the Coordinator. You're Will Hawkline!" He whirled around and yelled, "This is what we want! He has the back-time invention in his head! Detonate the planet! Destroy Earth!"

"Oh... Althair!" Jonna's soft hurt cry was the last thing I heard as the cruiser hung over Earth and a meercath slammed his

hand down on the planet, smashing control.

There was a spiraling whirl and a blink of black, and a staggering, sickening feeling like traveling in zero time.

It was traveling in zero time.

And the terrible lightnings stroked out from the cruiser, red from this side, blue from that, green from below and a terrible yellow from above, and they met in a river of coruscating white as they plunged into the heart of the planet below, cracked it, kindled it, scorched and exploded it and turned it into a furious little star.

And the planet was Orel, and with it went the Mindpod, whoever they were, and never again would they move through the worlds, taking and killing.

But oh! my pups, my pammies: Oh! I stood with the Earth people and felt drowned in color and I couldn't breathe for shock and sorrow. Yes, the Mindpod was gone, and no, they would no longer menace us, or Earth, or anyone else; but oh, Orel and its little animals, its brave

● *They stood looking into
each other's eyes
for a long while, and I could
see it happening:
first his acceptance of what
she felt, and the
beginnings of his acceptance
of what he felt.* ●

grass and the swirls and swarms of life in its seas; any hope it might have to evolve and grow is gone forever from the universe. Oh yes, there are lots more worlds and lots more life, but sometimes, when you have done a good thing, you have to look at all of the good thing, and wonder forever if there couldn't have been a better way, a way wherein nothing died.

We watched the death of Orel, all of Orel, layer after layer boiling and swirling: lava, explosions of gas, torn mountains, insane winds and oceans flowing into space. Never mind the Mindpod; never mind the meercaths; I cried for a world and all the life on that world, which can never be known again except in memory.

Meercaths... what of the meercaths? If I found myself heart-torn and shaking at the sight, what of the meercaths who had to watch their own home dying like that?

I looked around, and... and... and an incredible something else happened. With the death of the Mindpod, all of the meercaths in the cruiser disappeared. For each there was little pop! of vacuums as they ceased to exist, and we understood at last that each was a projection, a solid projec-

tion, of a real meercath on the planet; and when they were gone, the projections were gone, too.

I mindspoke: "Thank you, Little John Five." And the answer came back. "Can I sleep now?"

"Sleep, my friend."

I dropped the shield. They looked at me, Jonna and Will, as if they did not know what to say to me.

I said, "I know I gave you a bad time for a while. I needed to get you to the bridge without your getting killed on the way; I needed to have the commander see you and think he had you captured; it was the one thing which would make him smash the planet, and do it before he could find out what Little John Five had done."

"Five! Where is Five? What did he do?"

"Something neither you nor I could have done. All the orders on a big jug like this come through the computer. The commander's orders were meant to be: *Detonate the planet. Return to Orel.* Little John Five thought himself into the computer and made the orders go: *Return to Orel. Detonate the planet.*... He's asleep, down there where we left him. Let him sleep. He's already set your course for Earth. Just touch that little light over there—yes, the green one—and off you'll go. But don't forget to message ahead. Earth may smash this cruiser the moment they detect it."

"Will you come with us?"

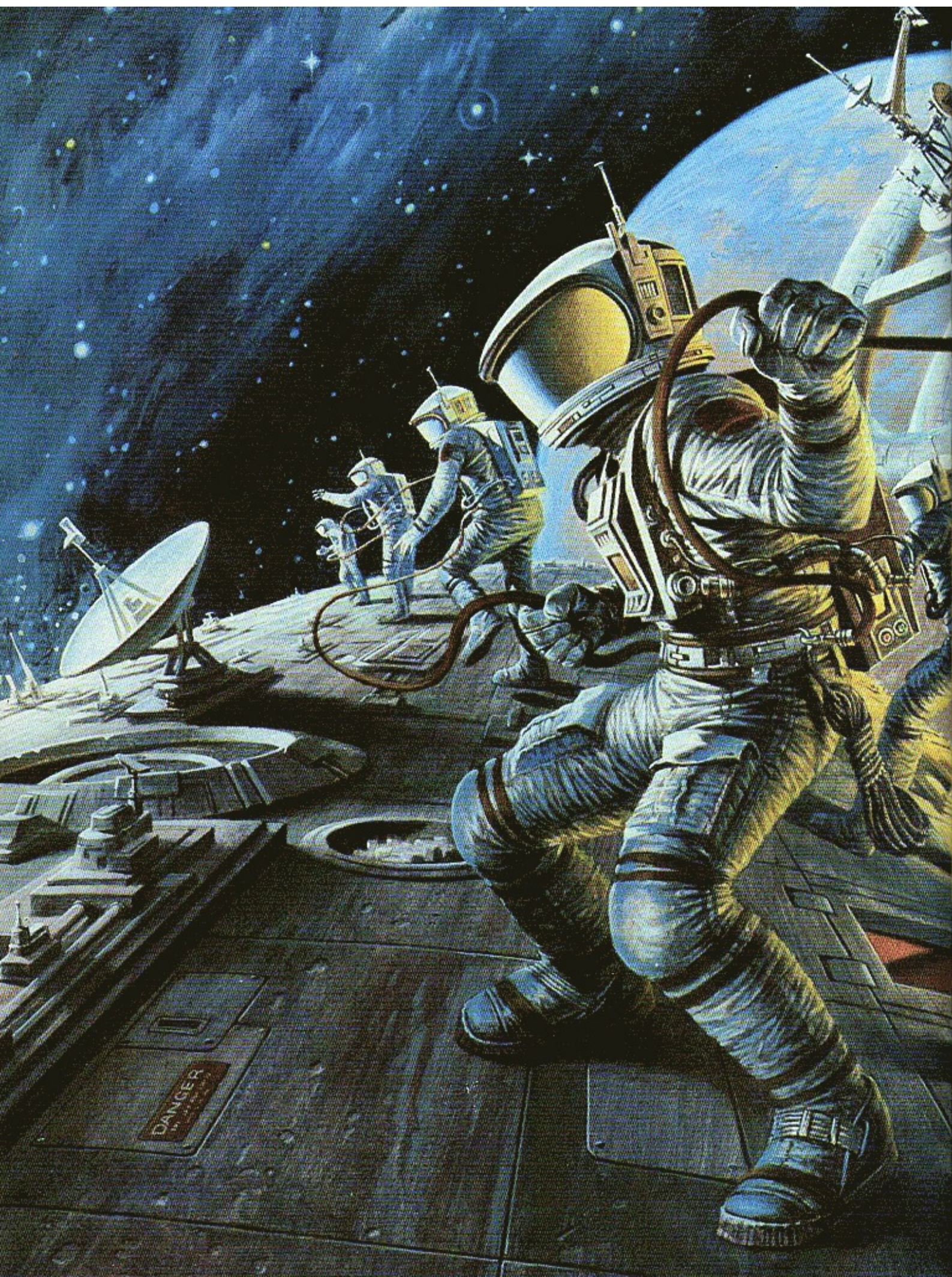
"Oh my. No," I said. "I have something to do at home. Will," I said suddenly, because I couldn't help myself, "you learned acceptance... almost... try learning it the rest of the way. Take your time. The little green light will wait."

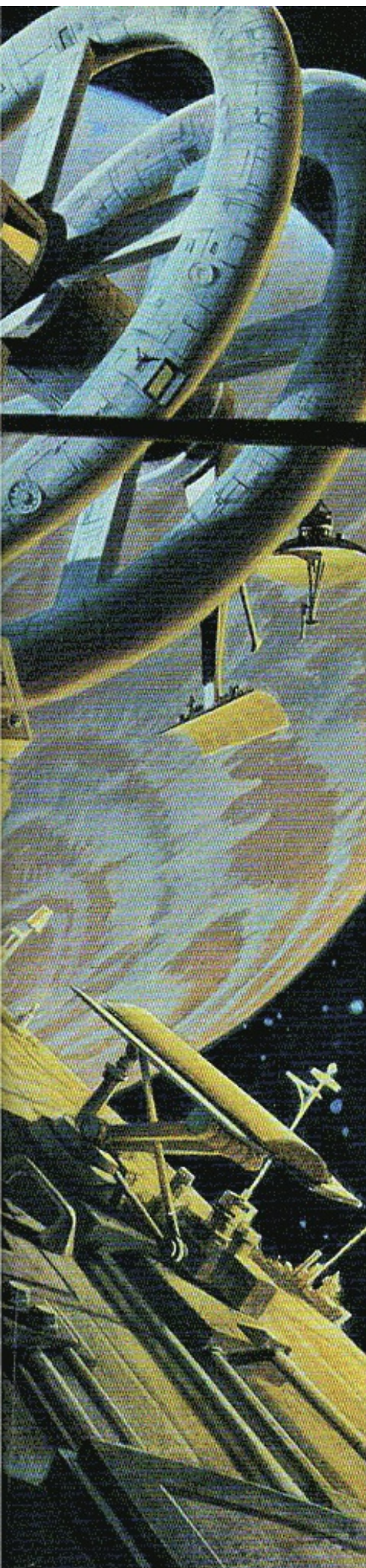
They stood looking into each other's eyes for a long while, and I could see it happening: first his acceptance of what she felt, and the beginnings of his acceptance of what he felt. I called on the mindnet and went home. I had a story to tell.

He was sleek and he was furry; he was totally amphibious, and Althair the Adventurer was what he really was. However, he was known on his lovely planet Ceer as Althair the Storyteller just because he did that better—even than adventuring.

Story time was over. Slithering lithe, surfing, sliding, inchworming, crackly-whiskered, beady-bright, soft and smooth and shining, went the young, back to the ocean, back to sleepy-couches in the living-places. I'll be Althair! they would play tomorrow. I'll be Jonna, I'll be Will. This is my myth aborning, this, what myth is for. ☐

Theodore Sturgeon, prominent SF short-story writer for more than thirty years and author of several novels, most notably More Than Human, an International Fantasy Award winner, is famous as a stylist and for his preoccupation with the ameliorating power of love. In Time Warp, Sturgeon seems to be saying that in both matters of politics and of the heart, sometimes the way to get ahead is to go along.





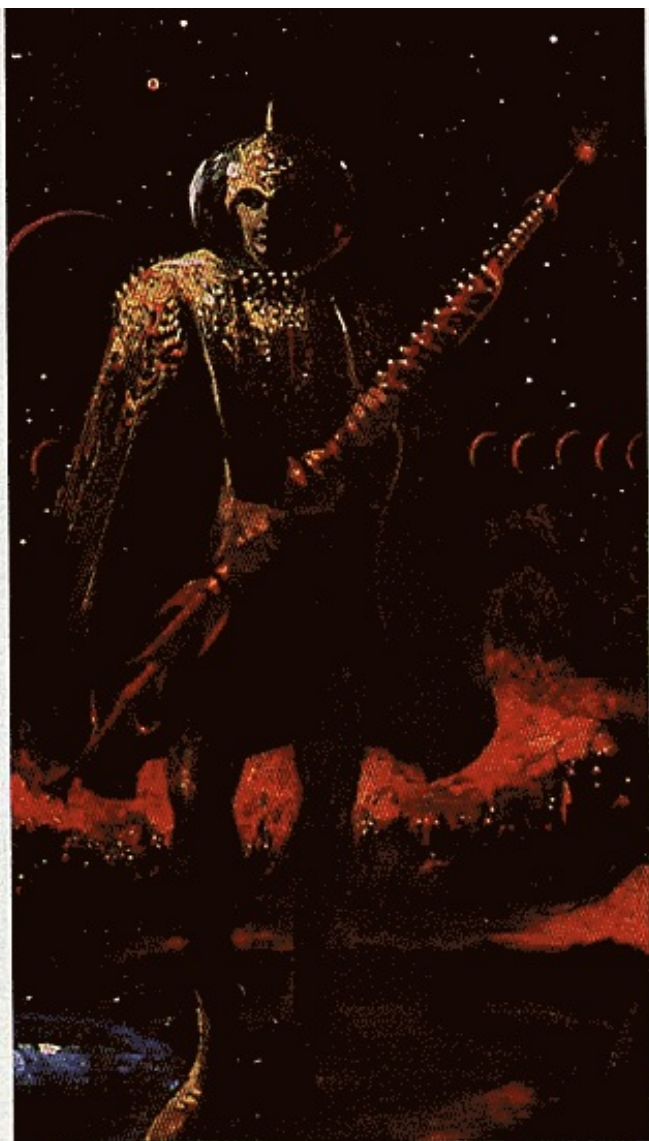
STAR SEEKERS

BY ROBERT SHECKLEY

A new frontier has finally opened, and the human race is at last on its way into the universe. Yesterday our first Columbuses landed on the moon, and today our Magellans are training to explore the star lanes.

A flood of imaginative speculation precedes them



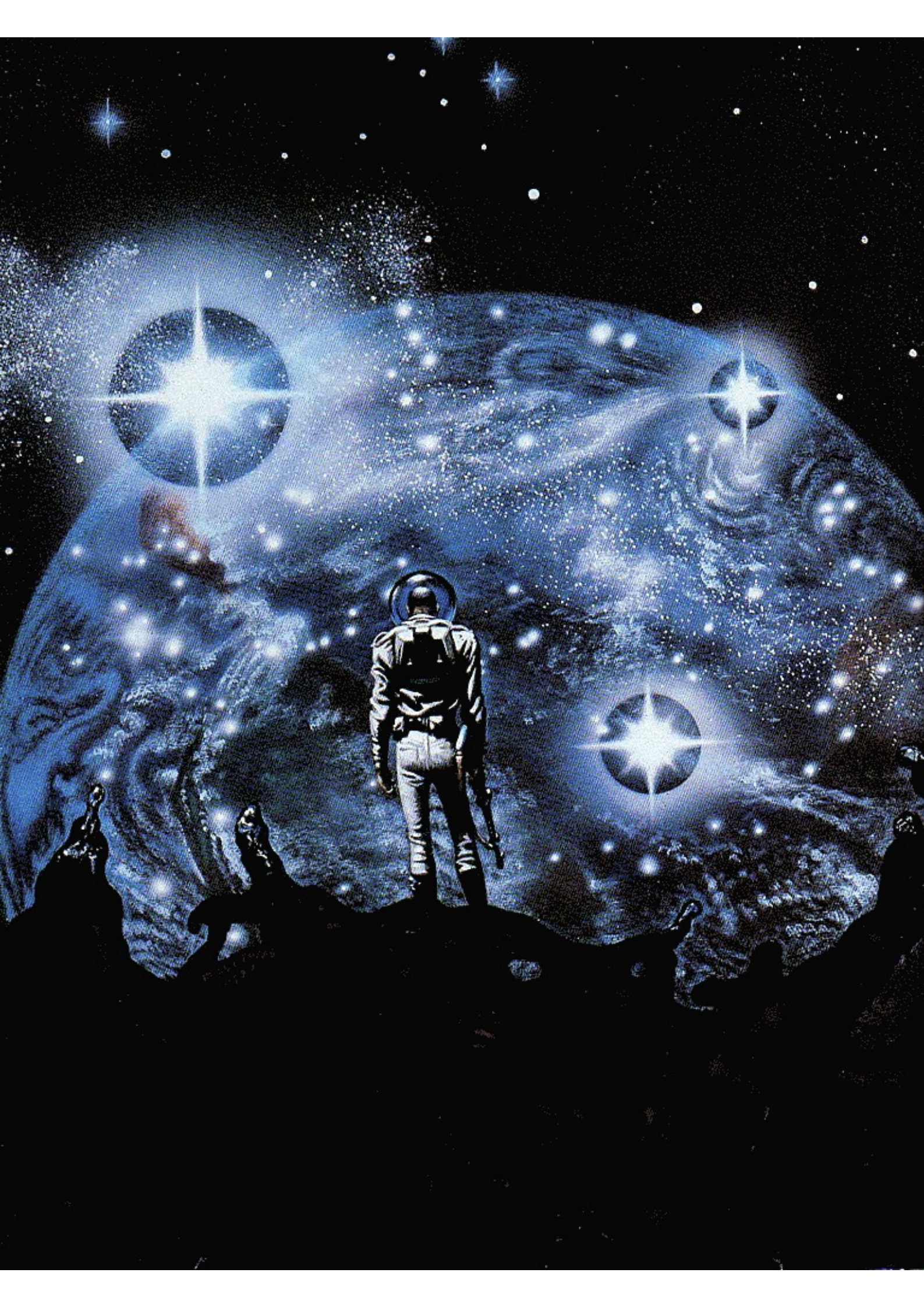


An air of anxiety hangs over many of our imaginary astral journeys. We have some idea of the difficulties in getting there, in staying alive once we are there, in getting back in one piece. We worry with reason: We know that our fantasies are fantastical only in detail, not in essence. We are going to have to deal not only with the hypothesized strangeness of alien intelligence but with the documented strangeness of our own natures. The exploration of alien worlds is a very modern preoccupation, but with ancient roots. Pliny and Strabo wrote about creatures that carried their head under their arm and hopped around on one foot, and Rudolf Erich Raspe sent Baron Munchausen to the moon. After Columbus, the exotic races and bizarre dream cities were relocated to the new unknown, the Americas. Today's explorers of the unknown are the science-fiction writers and artists. They go far beyond anything the

(Preceding page) Making Repairs, by Darrell Sweet; Seeking New Life Forms, by Rowena Morrill; (above) Galactic Warriors, by Paul Lehr (left) and John Schoenherr (right); (right) Confrontation with Hostile Alien, by Kenn Barr.



KEN BAI





ancient or medieval worlds knew in freedom from dogma, in range of speculation, in emotional breadth, and, above all, in attention to details, both physical and psychological. The thrust of speculation in our age is Janus-faced, looking outward to the ends of the universe and simultaneously inward to the depths of our beings. The psychological aspect is inescapable in this age of Heisenbergian indeterminacy. There are dangers in the voyage to unknown worlds, but we are unable to hold back. We cannot live without mystery. The trip into the unknown is perhaps an archetype of the human spirit; it gives us a chance to relive the multicolored and dimly remembered fantasies of our childhood; it provides an escape from the matter-of-factness of everyday life; a time to be illuminated by the strange and be transformed by the unknown; to experience, and to know that we are experiencing. ☐

(Clockwise from left) *A Long Way from Home*, cover painting by Kelly Freas for Caedmon's 1977 recording of Robert A. Heinlein's *The Green Hills of Earth*; *Taken Hostage*, by Michael Whelan; *The One Who Stayed Behind*, by Darrell Sweet.

“Alien landscapes from the unconsciousness await the explorer of inner/outer space.”

Painting, Sleepers II, by George Tooker. From the collection, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Larry Aldrich Foundation Fund.



THE WEARIEST RIVER

*His sworn duty was
to protect the
hospital—which
would save
lives. But
there were
enemies within.*

PAINTING BY
BY LLOYD BIGGLE, JR. GEORGE TOOKER



The sounds came from directly behind him. *Purr . . . click . . . swish.* Carlton Conlan Connager instinctively stepped to the side of the corridor, and the Patient Transport Vehicle hummed its way past him. The patient, who was seated HR, half reclining, looked up in sudden fright when Connager's figure momentarily loomed over him. Then the PTV moved on, another click sounded followed by a swish as it turned a

corner, and it disappeared into the Hydrotherapy Center.

Connager scowled after it. He'd never heard of a hydrotherapy patient who hadn't loved the treatments, but this one had been panicky. And when Connager paused at the open door and looked in, old Mannighan, the hydrotechnician, started and peered anxiously at him until his acute myopia finally identified Connager.

Patients, employees, staff. All of them were frightened. Some of them were terrified because they'd never been frightened before.

Purr . . . click . . . swish. Connager stepped aside. Another patient, riding fully reclined, looked up at him in fright. Connager watched the humming PTV until it turned the next corner. Then he walked on, slowly.

The stockroom manager, Ritale Melmann Danvist, looked up uneasily when he entered and then gave him a formidable frown. "What is it now?"

"Found the missing hypos?" Connager asked lightly.

"Look. No one in this hospital has used a disposable hypo for years. I'm positive they were marked for destruction long before I took this lousy job. They just happened to turn up missing on my first inventory, so I'm stuck." She eyed him worriedly and asked, "What's there to worry about?"

Connager leaned over the counter. "Public Security thinks they vanished into the cotics trade. I disagree. Did you know that Pharmacy has lost track of a couple of liters of Tharmenol?"

She stared at him.

"Tharmenol is a powerful injectable barbiturate," he went on. "Five cc's, even if injected in a muscle, would kill a healthy

human." Connager turned away. In the doorway he paused to look back. She was regarding him with an entirely different kind of worry. "Those missing hypos had five-cc syringes," he said.

He walked on toward Pharmacy, where a frenzied inventory was under way with an outside accountant on hand to tabulate prescriptions. Before he reached it, his jacket pocket beeped twice. He took the com disc from his pocket, activated it, and said wearily, "Hospital Security. Connager."

"You sound tired," the mellifluous voice announced.

"Dead," Connager agreed absently.

The voice laughed warmly. "This is the wrong place to say that. Were you up all night?"

"I've been up the past two nights."

The voice laughed again. "The director has agreed to meet with a committee of pickets. He'd like to have you present."

"Tell Doctor Alfnol I'll make the arrangements for this meeting myself. We don't want one of those youngsters smuggling a bomb into the hospital."

He switched the disc to another channel. "Connager. Emotional Therapy report, please."

A different voice announced crisply, "Traffic heavy, flow continuous, occupancy close to capacity but no problems."

Connager pocketed the disc and headed for his Security Section, wondering about that warm and vivacious and carefree voice that spoke to him several times a day from the director's office. He had never met the owner, but he suspected that she was a sour-looking, homely old shrew. Things usually worked out that way.

Purr . . . click . . . swish. Connager stepped aside and watched another frightened patient recede into the distance.

Connager met the committee of pickets at the front gate. The lines were moving more slowly than they had that morning, and all of the pickets looked tired and hungrier and dirtier. Some of their signs—*Death with Dignity . . . We Demand the Right to Die in Privacy . . . Hospitals, not Circuses . . . Natural Death Is an Affront to Humanity*—were torn and drooping.

Like the other pickets, the members of the committee were young—all of them under 20—and they looked unwashed and untidy. Connager asked for their identity tags and gravely copied their names into his notebook: Lynar Dab-375, a tall, gangly youth still afflicted with adolescent acne; Jolan Sill-264, a husky youngster whose bulging contacts hinted at a lifetime of vision disability; Stel Mur-973, a slender girl with a boyish figure, tousled hair, and a smudged face, but with far more poise of manner than the males. The girl and Jolan were wearing stretch suits, which two or three years before had been the adolescent fad in nonclothing. Probably they hadn't been able to afford new wardrobes since their education allowances had terminated. Lynar was clad in the dusky garb of manual employment. He, at least, had worked at something, or affected to.

The hospital's director, Marnsdorf Hardley Alfnol, was waiting for them in Connager's own office. He arose when they entered and regarded the youths distastefully, as though such obviously diseased specimens were unsafe in any hospital department except the morgue. Connager performed introductions and got everyone seated.

The director leaned across Connager's desk and cleared his throat ostentatiously. "You are—ah—the committee. What can I do for you?"

He was a paunchy, intensely serious individual—a distinguished physician, an excellent administrator, and an outstanding citizen—but he belonged to the wrong generation and the wrong world. The boys regarded him belligerently. The girl, whose steady gaze had been fixed upon him from the moment they entered the room, leaned forward and spoke.

"You can let your patients die in peace and comfort and dignity."

Alfnol cleared his throat again. "My dear young people. In this institution, death is not our profession. We are dedicated to life—to healing, to repairing accident-



damaged bodies, to correcting genetic errors, to curing the diseased, to keeping people alive and enabling them to live happy and useful lives. Fewer than five percent of those admitted to this institution die. Our handling of those few is prescribed by law. The moment a patient becomes terminal, our responsibility ends, and we transfer him or her to the terminal wards, as the law requires. You should be picketing the legislature."

"We are," the girl said. "But of course the legislators say that they make laws in the area of medicine only on the recommendation of doctors." She paused. "There once was a physician named Hippocrates. You may have heard of him. He said, 'Wherever the art of medicine is loved, there also is the love of humanity.' If the art of medicine is loved in this hospital, as you claim, the love of humanity will force you to defy the law and its inhumane strictures on natural death."

The director managed a hurt smile. "You are asking those who devote their lives to the repair and cure of damaged and diseased bodies, you are asking them to prove that they love humanity?"

"One who loves humanity loves all of humanity," the girl said bitterly. "The healthy, the sick—and the dying. Take me to the terminal wards and demonstrate your love of humanity by ending the suffering there."

"However much we may sympathize with your objectives, we must obey the law," Alford said.

The conversation continued, but the looming shadow of the law lay heavily across every question. Finally, without a trace of amenities, the young people got to their feet and marched out. Connager left with them and walked them past the various guard posts to the main gate. The guards there opened the gate for them, and as the other pickets surged forward to ask what had happened inside, Connager spoke curtly to the committee.

"I'd like to show you something." He turned and walked away, following the parkway outside the hospital's fence. The committee trailed after him. He could have avoided the long walk by cutting through the hospital from his office, but revealing the staff communication system to these unwashed youngsters would have left him open to scathing criticism. Connager had to go out of his way to avoid criticism. The director of anything made enemies, and a new director of hospital security made more than he deserved.

They turned the distant corner, walked almost the full length of the grounds, and finally reached a seldom used service entrance. The guard there regarded all of them suspiciously before he unlocked the gate.

"In case you didn't know," the boy Lynar said good-naturedly as they started across the grounds, "we don't need exercise. We've been walking for two days and nights."

"So have I," Connager told him sourly.

They followed the drive, circling a wing of the hospital to reach an unused loading dock. At regular intervals they passed guards, who nodded to Connager. At the dock entrance they signed in, after which another guard spoke to a com disc and a guard inside opened a door for them. They walked along a corridor, passed through another guarded, locked door, and emerged in a lobby.

The sign said EMOTIONAL THERAPY CENTER. Patients flowed in two directions. Those departing were taking descending escalators to the hospital's underground transit terminal; those arriving were stepping from ascending escalators, fumbling for their treatment cards, and hurrying toward the queues formed at gates that matched the color of their cards.

The pickets took in the scene perplexedly and then turned questioningly to Connager.

"I wanted to show you your problem," Connager said.

*• You are asking
those who devote their
lives to the
repair and cure of
damaged and
diseased bodies, you are
asking them to
prove that they love humanity? •*

Stel asked sarcastically, "Our problem?"

"Humanity's problem, if you prefer it that way. As long as people feel a need for emotional therapy, are willing to pay for it, and have psychiatrists willing to prescribe it and call it necessary, we'll have laws about natural death. There are the people you should picket."

"They're sick," Stel announced scornfully. "What good would it do to picket sick people?"

"Picket their psychiatrists, then. If this kind of therapy is necessary, the psychiatrists should be able to provide it humanely."

All three of them turned on him. "You sound as if you're on our side," Stel said.

"Ever been inside a terminal ward?" Connager asked.

They shook their heads.

"I have to take a minimum of three daily tours of the place. You kids can't imagine how bad it is. Yes, I'm on your side. But you're challenging a universal medical practice that happens to be legal. The only way to stop it is to get the law changed."

"Bringing the public's attention to such

horrors will put pressure on the legislature," Stel said confidently.

"More than half the public you're trying to arouse needs the emotional therapy you're trying to do away with," Connager said. "At least twenty-five percent couldn't function without it. Because of your picketing, the directors have closed the outpatient clinics, restricted admissions, and even cut back on some emergency services, but they wouldn't dare interrupt the emotional therapy treatment schedule. Look at the patients waiting for treatment, and then look at those leaving."

They were an abstracted cross section of gross humanity. Some were withdrawn, moody, depressed; some were elated, talking volubly, and laughing shrilly at their own pointless jokes; some were nondescript and would not have been taken for mental patients except in that particular lobby. Almost all of them carried binoculars. As their turns approached, they displayed the craving, the sickening eagerness, of 'cotics addicts about to receive a fix. And those emerging from treatment had a dazed, drugged appearance, sometimes ornamented with the smug smile of satiety.

"Now you know the problem," Connager said. "If I could think of an answer, I'd be glad to tell you what it is."

He took them back to the service entrance and left them. When he reached his own headquarters, he watched briefly a pair of monitor screens that showed the pickets marching peacefully along the fence and waving their signs. In the background, a lone Public Security agent was watching indifferently. Public Security, at least, did not panic at the sight of a few peaceful pickets; but Public Security wasn't responsible for what occurred inside the hospital.

Connager turned to an assistant, who was watching the row of interior surveillance screens. "Argorn made any interesting contacts?" he asked.

"She rarely speaks to anyone. She even eats alone."

She was walking with slow deliberation along a corridor; Nellisly Rhodhal Argorn, a sturdy-looking woman with a large frame and hefty shoulders. The hospital needed such help. One thing machines could not do was lift and care for patients, and Argorn was very good at it. She was strong but gentle. Her superiors thought highly of her, and they were indignant when Connager placed her on surveillance.

She stopped to look in both directions before she entered Ward 9E. The assistant punched a number, switching the monitor to another camera. Inside the ward, Argorn was slowly walking along a row of coffins.

Hospital employees called them coffins. They were life-support systems for the desperately ill, boxes with curved plastic lids that were closed when the patient was using oxygen, and they con-

tained all of the complicated electronic instrumentation and apparatuses necessary to monitor a patient's vital signs and supply nourishment or medication as prescribed—and sound an alarm at any significant deviation from the predicted norm.

Argorn paused several times to glance at the patients she passed, and finally—after cautiously looking about her again—she stopped by the coffin of patient 7-D-27-392A. Connager's assistant clicked a stopwatch. Argorn remained there for five minutes and 17 seconds, performing the routine chores a nurse's aid was responsible for—she sponged the patient's face, she performed a synch test on instruments and monitors, she rearranged the pillow, smoothed blankets, and saw that the patient was resting and breathing comfortably; and then, for a full two minutes, she stood and watched her. Finally she moved on, with brief glances at other patients.

Connager dialed the daily report on patient 7-D-27-392A and studied it thoughtfully: Ritella Downley Smithson, a widow, aged 102, diagnosis Retland's cancer, curable if detected in time, but hers hadn't been. The deteriorating-prognosis line had dropped below 20 percent. She would not be moved to a terminal ward until it reached zero. She had no known living relatives; she'd had no visitors.

And Argorn demonstrated a special interest in her. Connager asked his staff to find out why.

Connager's jacket pocket beeped twice. Connager took the com disc, activated it, and responded. "Hospital Security. Connager."

"Emergency board meeting," the seductive voice announced. "They want you."

"Everyone wants me," Connager said wearily. "It's because I'm so handsome."

The voice giggled warmly.

The board members were doctors of varying specializations, splendidly competent in medical matters and completely lost when confronted with a problem in security. All of them turned expectantly when Connager entered. Before he seated himself, he passed around a stack of reports.

"I've put my appraisal of the situation in writing, gentlemen," he said. "I see no reason to change a syllable of the recommendations I gave you at your last meeting. There is no external threat to this hospital. Those youngsters on the picket lines aren't about to storm the building. They think they're much more concerned about your patients than you are, because they include the terminal patients in their concern, and they're convinced that you don't. There is a serious potential threat to the patients, and you're right to be concerned about it, but it's an internal threat."

Dr. Alfnol said incredulously, "After all that's happened in the past three days, do you still maintain that this hospital's patients may be in danger from our own em-

ployees and staff?"

"Yes, sir, because of the lax procedures followed in hiring and in inventories prior to my transfer here. I state my recommendations in this report, and I'll repeat them verbally. Cut the external security to a reasonable minimum. Let me move my people inside, where they're needed."

"Are you aware that the number of pickets has doubled since noon?"

"Yes, sir. And I've never seen a more peaceful group of pickets. They may make threatening gestures, but that's only to attract public attention to what they consider a serious moral problem. Frankly, gentlemen, I'm wondering if they aren't performing a useful social function. They've managed to frighten everyone in the hospital, including you. When was the last time any of you were frightened? An occasional strong emotional reaction is healthy. If you have one often enough, it keeps you out of Emotional Therapy. Ask your psychiatrist."

Several of the doctors were looking at him angrily—which was, Connager reflected, another healthy emotional reaction. He said again, "The threat to this hospital's patients is an internal one. I've found no trace of the missing syringes. I've found no explanation for the alarming pharmaceutical shortage. I don't know how many undesirable employees we have because the proper checks weren't made at the time they were hired. I request permission to move my people inside."

"Do you still suspect Argorn?" the director demanded. "Her superiors think that's ridiculous."

"She was hired recently enough so that the information on her application could be checked, sir. And she lied about everything except the fact that she's female and her present address. I'd like to know why. I can't ask her, because that would alert her to the fact that I'm suspicious. If she has coconspirators, I want her to lead me to them."

"Ridiculous!" Dr. Alfnol muttered.

"No, sir. It's sufficient reason for watching her carefully, which is my job. I'm giving you my recommendations about security, which also is my job."

"Very well, Connager." The director wasn't enjoying being frightened, however therapeutic his psychiatric colleagues might consider it. "We'll consider your report and let you know."

It was almost dark when Connager left the building. He walked slowly down the drive to the main gate. He stood there for a time with the guards, watching the pickets. Two dark-haired girls, walking one behind the other, looked at him curiously and then looked away. There were now two indifferent agents; Public Security had doubled its force for the night shift.

"The kids shouldn't be blocking the gate," Connager announced.

The guards looked at him perplexedly. No visitors were being admitted, and there hadn't been any ground traffic in three

days. Connager signaled for the gate to be opened. "The idea," he said, "is to be firm." He went out to the parkway and began walking alongside the pickets, joking, asking questions, and then moving on. It was quite dark now, and several were carrying torches.

Finally, Connager reached one of the dark-haired girls. She spoke softly. "Stel made the arrangements. Everything is ready."

"Good. Tell her she can't be late. Everything depends on the timing."

"I wish we could come."

"No. There's risk enough without that. Your being there would turn a protest into a conspiracy."

He moved along to the other dark-haired girl and spoke to her about blocking the gate. Then he turned back. He motioned to the guards, who opened the gate for him. The pickets already had arranged their lines into two circling segments to leave the gate clear.

"How come they do what you tell them?" one of the guards asked.

"I always say please," Connager told him.

He returned to his headquarters. Doctor Alfnol was waiting there, talking with one of Connager's assistants. "Where have you been?" he demanded.

"Out persuading the pickets not to block the main gate."

"Oh. The board has rejected your recommendations. There are more pickets now than there were this afternoon. Keep the guards outside."

Connager said, "Sir, I'm worried about the terminal wards. At least let me bring enough people inside to put them under maximum security."

"The board sees the situation differently. Keep your people outside."

The director left. Connager told his assistant, "I'm going to rest awhile. Call me when you have to." He went to his office, stretched out on an uncomfortable sofa, and tried to sleep. At 2200 he was up again and making his rounds.

An uneasy quiet had settled on the hospital. The routine went its inexorable way without incident, and except for an occasional prentice nurse moving from one ward to another, Connager met no one. He missed the humming PTVs; theirs was the most characteristic sound of the modern hospital, but few patients were sent anywhere between their evening meal and breakfast, and none at all were moving about on this night.

He descended to the first level and spoke to his com disc. "Connager here. I'm going for a swing outside. I'll be out of contact for 30 or 40 minutes."

"All clear here," his assistant responded.

"What's Argorn doing?"

"Taking her break."

"I'll check in as soon as I'm back inside."

Connager turned into a short exit corridor that was off monitor, and he actually

opened a seldom used exterior door and closed it again. Then he stretched on a pair of surgical gloves. He unlocked and opened the metal cover to a service shaft, climbed in, and closed and locked it.

With a light dangling from his wrist, he climbed down a ladder to the hospital's lowest level. He emerged in another off-monitor corridor, crossed to a square metal door, and unlocked it. The tunnel to the hospital's power plant stretched before him—low, half filled with pipes, but easily negotiable.

He reached the end, unlocked the door there, and stepped into the power plant. Now he was outside the hospital's fence and the cordon of guards. The old boilers were no longer in use; the building was kept in maintenance in case of emergencies. There was no night attendant.

Connager went directly to an exit at the rear and unlocked it.

Stel stood there with eleven carefully chosen recruits. "Five females and seven males," she said. "It better be right. You're late."

"One minute early," Connager said. "Five and seven—check. Let's move." He passed out surgeon's gloves, and all of them, with unpracticed awkwardness, stretched them on. Then he motioned them inside and locked the door.

The time was 2244 when Connager emerged from the service shaft at the second-floor level. Leaving the 12 pickets clinging to the metal ladder, he replaced the cover and went to scout around.

"Connager here," he told his com disc. "Everything's still quiet," his assistant answered.

He returned to the shaft, motioned the pickets out, and led them to a storage room across the corridor. "You'll find uniforms there," he said. "Get dressed."

He left them and went for a brief inspection tour of that wing—up a flight, along a corridor, down a flight. A door at the end of the corridor opened. A group of nurses and prentices emerged. Connager counted them as they passed, nodding at him: the nursing staff of the terminal wards, going for its 2300 break. They all went together—who could be concerned about an emergency among patients placed on the hospital's discard heap to die? And they always left early and overstayed.

As soon as they turned the corner, Connager opened the door to the storage room. He motioned out the pickets, now dressed as nurses. He handed them a carton that had been hidden behind a stack of large containers: two gross of disposable hypodermic syringes, each of which Connager himself had filled with five cc's of Tharmenol—a lethal dose of a powerful, injectable barbiturate.

"Be back at this door at 2315 regardless," he said. He unlocked the door, hurried them through it, and closed and locked it after them.

Then he took out his com disc. "Connager here. I'm going into the terminal wards. ET levels. Mark me down as disconnected."

"Right. Everything's still quiet."

"I'll relieve you at 2400. You need some sleep."

"Right!"

Connager climbed a flight of stairs, unlocked a door, locked it after him. Three strides brought him to a second door, and he emerged from that one into an Emotional Therapy treatment session.

The balcony slanted steeply; the psychiatric patients sat staring down into the arena, most of them using binoculars. And in the arena were the rows of terminal patients dying the natural deaths that the law guaranteed and demanded, dying without medicine or medical condolence, dying in agony. Their twisted bodies heaved with pain, their moans and screams and wails reverberated from one sound amplifier to another.

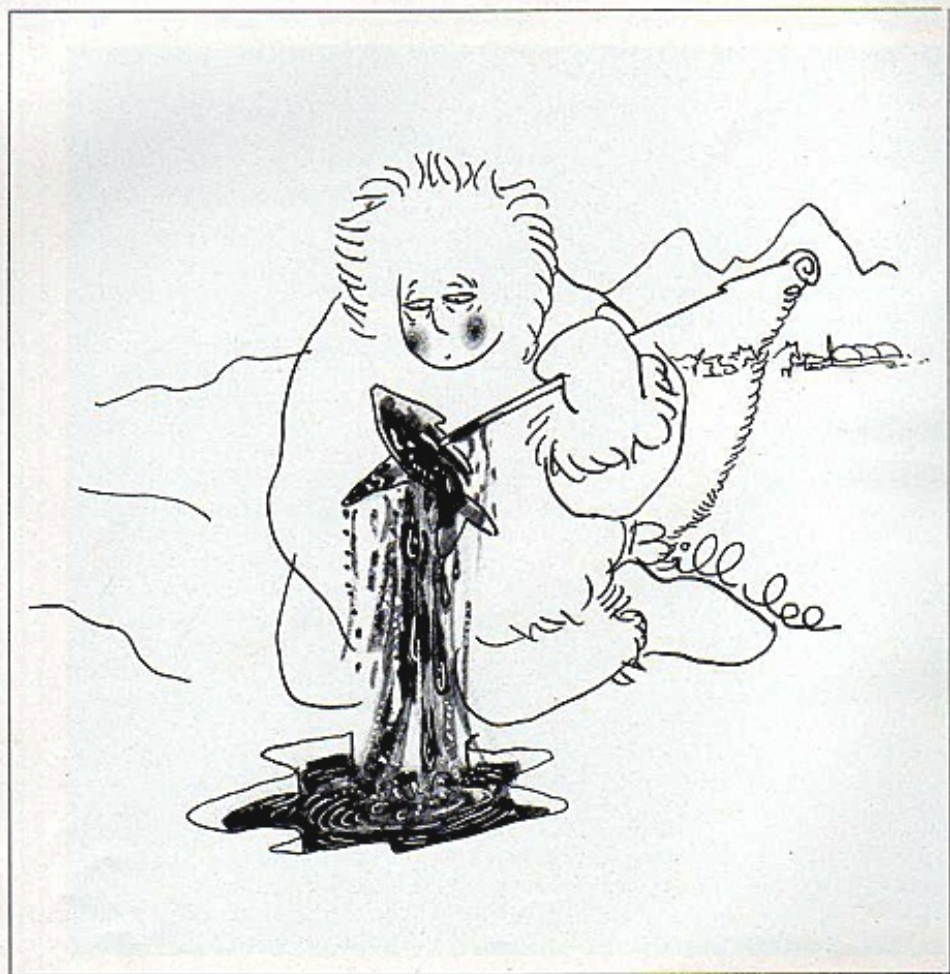
And the ET patients—the mentally ill whom this society had insulated from pain, from fear, from all the strong emotions it considered socially undesirable and who now had to be exposed to death agonies as therapy—these were bathing themselves in effusions of terminal torment. They sat transfixed, totally absorbed in the horrendous sufferings of the doomed patients below, vicariously experiencing a few minutes of death agony

each day to make an emotionally barren existence possible.

On the lower level, the dying patients' cots were arranged in double rows, with a space between them for the use of medical personnel, and those psychiatric patients with high disability indexes walked along a transparent wall on either side, stopping here and there to press their faces against the plastic barrier and drool at the convulsive anguish just beyond their noses.

Connager had never been able to view the scene without an impotent anger that sickened him, but on this night he had to remain tensely alert. Six of the pickets, disguised as nurses, were working along the dozen rows of patients: the males in pale blue trousers, coats, and caps; the females dressed the same except for their traditional nurse's headpiece. All of them wore surgical masks. In the adjoining ward, the other six would be working. They had 15 minutes to get to the far end of the ward and return. Stel had briefed them with care. Their nurse's posture was more than adequate as they routinely checked their patients—here bathing a face, there straightening a pillow, rearranging a twisted leg, covering a tormented body—and as a final caress injecting five cc's of Tharmenol into the patient's upper arm muscle.

It meant 20 patients for each masquerading nurse—240 in two wards; for only



the most agonizing deaths were put on display for Emotional Therapy. Those patients with the bad taste to die quietly were allowed to have their natural deaths without spectators.

Connager looked about for the psych techs. They had noticed nothing irregular, but they were watching their own patients, not the terminals whose suffering provided the treatment. He saw no psychiatrist on either balcony, but there rarely was one at this time of night—even though the treatments were available on a 24-hour schedule because the dying patients' suffering was continuous.

Connager turned his attention to one of the phony nurses. Already his movements looked practiced and efficient. He had achieved the mechanical indifference of the regular nurses, who knew that no kind of unsympathetic handling would distract from a profundity of torment. A touch of the brow with his left hand, a smoothing of a blanket; and his right hand swung home the syringe, emptied it, withdrew it, returned it to the cart he pushed ahead of him. The instrument of death was handled almost invisibly.

In the next aisle, one of the girls had reached the end of the row and started back. Connager looked at his watch. They were making better time than he had expected.

Anxiously, he turned his attention to the patients already injected. If they reacted

to the drug too quickly, if their agonies subsided before the pickets got out of the room, the result could be catastrophic. The ET patients would protest instantly. Connager had seen a near riot when three terminal patients had died simultaneously, thus depriving the watching ET patients of their therapy.

But there was no reaction—yet. Seven minutes. All of the nurses were working back on the opposite row of patients. Five minutes. Four.

Connager left the balcony and passed through the double doors back into the main hospital. The general-alarm gong was sounding when he opened the second door. He ignored it, coolly locking the door behind him. He ran down a flight of stairs, unlocked the stock room door, and went to open the door he had passed the pickets through.

Stel and another girl staggered out. Both had ripped off their surgical masks. The other girl was holding hers to her mouth, trying not to be sick. Their faces were pale and dripping with perspiration. Connager waved them to the stock room, and they began to strip off their uniforms before the door closed on them. A boy hurried out and went to join them. And another. The others came in a rush, and Connager counted 12 and locked the door. He went to the service shaft and removed the cover. As fast as they were able to change, the pickets hurried to the shaft and started

down. Connager went last, pausing to lock the stock room door and dump the uniforms down a laundry chute. Moments later he had the pickets scurrying back through the tunnel.

He took his com disc from his pocket. It beeped stridently when he activated it. "Connager here."

"Emergency!" his assistant gasped. "The pickets are rioting. Argorn turned off the life-support system on patient 7-D-27-392A. The director wants you."

"About the pickets, nonsense. Have you got Argorn?"

"Yes, but—"

"Then it's a medical problem. We've handled the security problem. Tell the director I want all available medical staff rushed to the terminal wards. Get those terminal wards nurses off their tails and back to the wards. Class one emergency. It's hot, and I'm chasing it. Forget the pickets. Don't call me."

He dropped the disc back into his pocket and climbed into the tunnel.

As he let the pickets out of the power plant door, they stripped off their gloves and handed them to him. "It was ghastly," Stel told him. Then she added, "Thank you."

"Get around there and get involved in the riot," Connager snapped.

They vanished into the night.

Connager retraced his steps, locking doors, removing traces. He dropped the gloves into an incinerator unit and watched them vanish. Then he climbed the stairs to ground level and took out his com disc.

"All right," he said. "Whoever it was, they got away. Where are my people?"

"They've all gone to the terminal wards."

"How's the riot?"

"They're still making lots of noise, and they threw something over the fence that's burning, but I guess they aren't doing much."

"Then I'm going to the terminal wards."

He pocketed the disc and walked along briskly, ignoring his fatigue. He would be up the rest of the night, but after that he could go home and go to bed. For the first time in three days.

The director's face was ashen. "They're all dead! They killed every one of them!"

"Not dead," Connager said. "Murdered."

Dr. Alfnol's jaw moved, but no sound came out. Then, abruptly, he was angry. "You—the director of security. Where were you?"

"A director of security," Connager said bitterly, "with a board that vetoes every recommendation I make. You wouldn't let me move security personnel in here, so I came myself."

Dr. Alfnol stared. "You were here?"

"In person," Connager said, still sounding bitter. "But one person can't cover all the levels. I must have witnessed at least 50 murders, and I didn't suspect a thing until it was too late."



"You mean—you saw it done?"

"I saw it done. By people wearing nurses' uniforms. And it wasn't until it was almost over that I suddenly remembered that the ward nurses take their break at 2300. They all go together, and I saw them go. But I was watching the ET patients, and I'm tired, and I didn't react to what was going on until it was too late."

"But—what did they do?"

"They fussed with each patient, the way nurses do. What they did is a medical problem."

"Yes. Of course." Alfnol paused. "Argorn. You were right about her, too. But she claims that a gauge was malfunctioning and the alarm didn't go off and she set it off deliberately to get help quickly."

"Could it have happened the way she said?"

"Yes, I suppose it could."

"Then maybe I was wrong about her. I'll have a look. I want the data sheets on the murdered patients." He turned.

The director said, "Connager—"

Connager turned again and faced him.

"I'm sorry, Connager. You were right. We were stupid."

"No, sir," Connager said, "but you violated one of the basic principles of your profession. Don't call in a specialist if you're not going to believe him unless he agrees with you. I don't tell you how to fix people's insides. You shouldn't be telling me about security. I've been doing the one as long as you've been doing the other."

"I never thought of it that way."

"What about the ET program?" Connager asked.

"We're bringing in terminal cases from the other hospitals. Each one will let us have a few. We'll have the program going again shortly."

Connager had a brief interview with Argorn, and then he told her superior to put her back to work. "She may be entitled to a commendation," he said.

The nurse looked at him strangely. "That's odd. I thought you didn't like her."

"Emotions such as like and dislike belong to Emotional Therapy. The only emotional luxury a director of security can afford is to be suspicious."

He returned to his headquarters and relaxed for a time, watching the pickets on the monitors. They had quieted down, and several Public Security agents were standing by conspicuously.

Then his assistant came in. "Those pickets that were here this afternoon. They want to see you. To apologize for the fires—they say."

"I'll see them in my office," Connager said.

They came in quietly, escorted by a Public Security agent whom Stel had persuaded to bring them to Connager. "It's all right, officer," Connager told him. "You can leave them with me."

The agent nodded and stepped back. The door closed.

"We just heard," Stel said angrily.

"They're bringing terminal patients from the other hospitals. We didn't do a bit of good. You lied to us."

"Two hundred and forty patients were dying in agony," Connager said softly. "Now they're no longer in agony. That isn't good?"

"It didn't change anything."

"Changing things takes time," Connager said. "You've been picketing for three days, and no one outside the hospital has noticed. But the public will notice this—two hundred and forty murders can't be hushed up. People will start thinking about those patients, thinking about what will happen to them when it's their turn for a natural death. And that may change things—eventually."

She brightened. "I didn't think of that. You're right. They can't hush up murders." She started to get to her feet, and then she turned to him again. "There's something I've been wondering about ever since—I mean, why don't people realize how horrible it is? I know there's all that double-talk about the law, but those who make the laws are voted for, and the medical profession advises them, and why does everyone let it keep happening?"

"People do surprising things for money," Connager said. "The Emotional Therapy centers are immensely profitable. The public won't pay taxes to support hospitals, but it's always willing to pay for entertainment."

They left, and Connager leaned back and closed his eyes and reminded himself that he was no longer young. For these youngsters, it was an achievement. Something they would always remember. For him, something he preferred to forget, with another weary night of security routine to follow.

His assistant came in. "Here are the data sheets on the murdered patients."

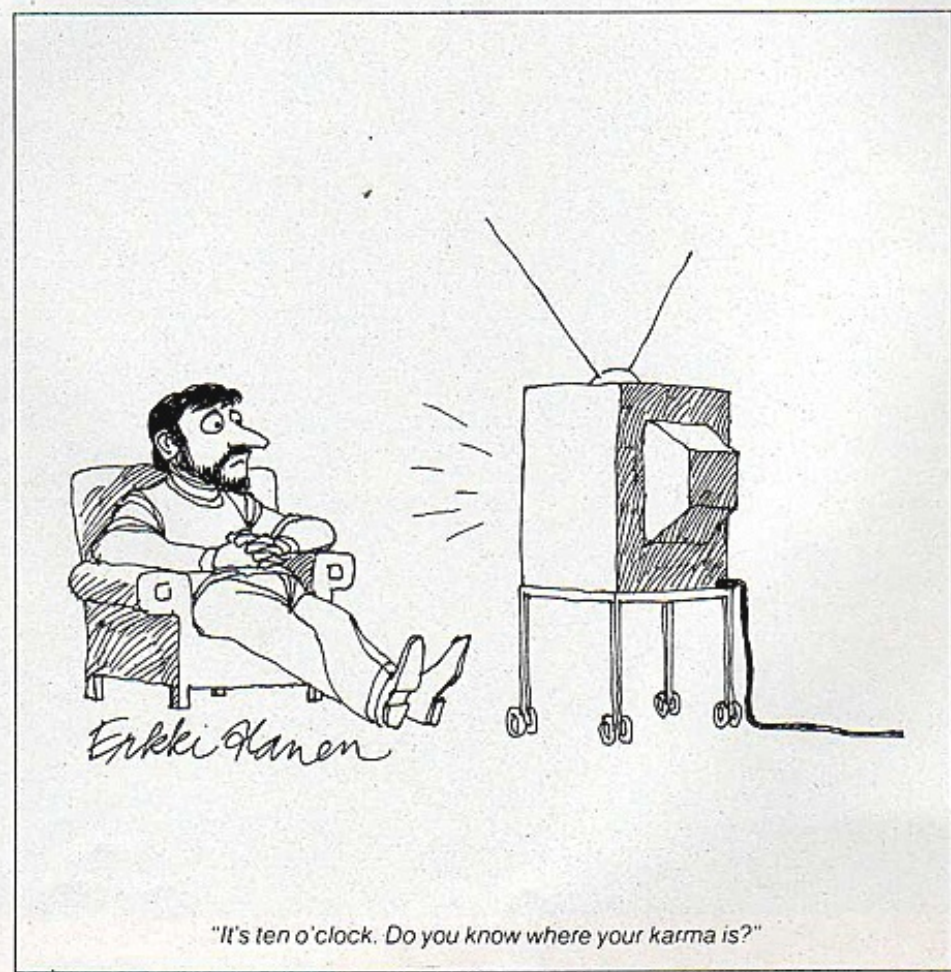
Connager took the stack of folders and began to leaf through them. He found the one he wanted. Veranone Janling Marcone. Age ninety-seven. Relatives, none known. Visitors, none.

No relatives except a daughter willing to take a job as a nurse's aid just to be near her mother, and a son willing to take a demotion to transfer to the hospital as director of security so he could visit her several times a day. And—when her illness became terminal—two granddaughters willing to organize pickets in a monstrous conspiracy they all took part in to end an old woman's death agony.

A pity, Connager thought, that the psychiatrists practicing emotional therapy couldn't expose their patients to love instead of suffering. But perhaps they considered love a dangerous emotion better left suppressed. It could lead to murder.

"But it's also a beginning," Connager said softly. "It's one suffering old woman's ending, and it's a beginning."

He closed the folder. **OO**



*She could control
the sharks, but who controlled her?*

LOBOTOMY SHOALS

BY JULEEN BRANTINGHAM

Sharks followed the school of fish, as sharks have been doing for millions of years. The new element was the submarine, an oversized coffin, within the shark pack, following the fish.

From time to time, sharks would dart out of the pack, to the right or the left, driving in stragglers. In the crannies of the rock piles on the bottom, moray eels watched this action as dogs might watch for crumbs to drop from the master table. But there were no crumbs. These sharks were not feeding.

The morays also watched the submarine as it passed. Its shape was like that of a shark, but, from its actions, the morays categorized it as not immediately dangerous. Its smell/taste was thin and bitter, not like that of the soft things on which the morays fed.

But the eels continued to watch until the school, pack, and intruder faded from sight. An ocean predator seldom knows where its next meal is coming from until the scent of blood spreads in the water.

Tinkertoy was nuzzling my submarine's rear stabilizer. Just before burnout, old hammerheads get as friendly as puppies. A pony is designed to withstand abuse; that's the word from topside. But that's topside. Up there they don't have to worry about getting too close to playmates with lots of teeth.

This promised to be a tough patrol. I'd relieved Tindall, my alternate, off the eastern tip of Cuba. I was

sweeping a school of mackerel up the shelf to Atlantic Fisheries Corporation's Station Number Seven at Grand Abaco. Tindall had reported the school to be losing mass. Down an estimated 700 kilos since the spotters had tagged it out in the Deep. Something was slipping in under the noses of the pack and the scopes of the pony.

Civilians seem to think a pack can protect the school against anything, but that just shows how little they know about conditions out here. Throwing a pack against healthy celaceans or a good-sized great white would be mass murder. The pack's job is to herd the school into the catch pens before word gets around that a free lunch is in the neighborhood.

Besides losing mass in the school, the pack was down to 37. Tindall had reported four losses. Two, he said, had been rammed by porpoises. But Tindall's been my alternate for three years now and I know him. He likes to play with the pack. So his burnout rate is way too high, and he tries to hide it from the cost accountants. He probably burned all four, plus Tinkertoy. There's no mistake, the way the old boy's acting. He's close.

I'll hate to see him go. I was running the pack a year and a half ago when the trainer delivered Tinkertoy and a couple of tigers. First thing he did was shimmy through the pack, wagging his head like it wasn't enough that he had

an eye at each end of that ridiculous deformity and he was afraid of missing out on something.

There was a bump from amidships. Tinkertoy had seen me come out of the lock often enough to make a lie of its name on the parts list—Emergency Escape Chamber.

There's something about a hammerhead. I don't think any herder feels neutral about them. They look like a cross between a nightmare and an abortion, but they have brains that can be conditioned and programmed to herd fish, just like any other shark. Some herders would run all-hammerhead packs if they could. Others have threatened to torp the trainer if he ever delivers one.

I've had some minor troubles with hammerheads. And I've had some good experiences, mostly with Tinkertoy. He's always the first to go into action when I use the Voice. When there's a predator around, Tinkertoy seems impatient for my command to go at it.

I haven't named any of the others in the pack, and Tindall wouldn't. We're warned not to do that, not to get emotionally attached. Sharks may not seem lovable to civilians, but when you work with them day after day, you learn their little quirks. It's hard to see a friend nearing brain death.

There was another nudge from amidships. He was acting like a little boy. I could almost read his mind. "Can Petey come out and play games with me?"

Cancel that. Erase. I could not read Tinkertoy's mind, did not know what he wanted. Could not. Did not. The Voice works only one way and just no other.

I steered the pony through the pack. Warned by the pressure wave, sharks scooted right and left, never crossing the invisible barrier that their conditioning set up between them and the school. I'd hoped Tinkertoy would turn his attention to one of the others, but a rasp along the hull proved his loyalty.

"Please, Petey. Let's play. Let's play."

Wrong. He wasn't thinking that. He wasn't thinking at all. He was just a big, dumb fish. Maybe he was horny and had mistaken me for a female hammerhead. How would I know?

The Voice works only one way, just like I said.

I reached hesitantly for my mike switch. Tinkertoy was close to burnout. One more command might trigger it, and the pack was understrength now. But I did reach for the switch. I'd been in the pony for over 24 hours, and before that I'd had two weeks of the violence and filth of topside.

I needed to go out. I was carefully not thinking about the rumors. My brain was all right. I just needed to go out for a swim, to relax.

The bars in the ports are full of rumors and stories and things that have to be pure myth. God knows where they all come from. There just is no such animal as an old fish herder.

PAINTING BY CLIFF McREYNOLDS



Once in a while a wild shark will swim with the pack. Sharks aren't like dogs or wolves or even lions. They don't hunt cooperatively. But where the food supply is good, they gather in groups, especially hammerheads.

When a wild shark joins a guard pack, it never stays long. Even if the pack doesn't drive it away, the wild one becomes more and more skittish and bad-tempered. The Voice hardware doesn't show on a shark's head, but apparently the wild ones can sense something.

It's the same with fish herders and civilians.

In every port city close to a harvesting station, there are one or two special bars. There is no canned music, the voices are hushed, and the light is sort of green and peaceful. The customers move slowly, and there's a blasted look in their eyes. Those are the fish herders' bars.

The owners of those places aren't going to get rich. The stuff they sell doesn't have much of an effect compared to the smoothed-out feeling we carry over from our jobs. The only reason we need the bars at all is as a retreat.

When a civilian wanders in by mistake, we don't chase him away. We'll talk about our jobs if he wants to listen, or about the happenings topside—though that's harder because most of us are deliberately out of touch. But the civilians don't stay long. They become more and more nervous, as if they can sense some kind of hardware in our heads, something that changes us.

There is no hardware. Our heads are as clean as theirs. But we're not sorry to see them go. Civilians are too loud, too tight, too scared.

When fish herders are alone we talk about the most important things in the world: the packs, the predators, the ocean. And sometimes we wonder why there are no old fish herders. Why is it that nearly every week at least one pony fails to meet its okay schedule?

Civilians pity us. They're always talking about the loneliness and the danger. They talk about the sacrifices we have to make to feed the millions topside. They ought to take a good look at their world: crowds, noise, shortages, tension, rules, ugliness, hostility, and more rules. They can have it.

Pass through the surface of the ocean and you leave all that behind. Herders are the last of the free people. It's clean down here. It's peaceful. It's beautiful.

Sure, there's danger. Hulls crack, systems fail, and outside there's an ocean full of predators with an appetite for red meat. But that's just the way things even out. Maybe what topside needs is a little more danger, a few more predators.

The packs themselves are right at the top of the list of dangers. Oh, they've been conditioned to avoid a human body in the water, but conditioning works best with an animal that's at least semi-intelligent. You need the Voice to guarantee control and you can't use it from outside. I guess the

Atlantic Fisheries Corporation figures they'll lose fewer of us if they keep us in the ponies. Scared, like all topsiders.

Herders aren't the first to find the ocean more attractive than topside. Cetaceans used to be land animals, too.

There's no sacrifice involved in being a herder, in spite of the stuff they spout in the training sessions. We're down here because this is where we want to be. But sometimes we wonder why no one has ever beaten the odds. Sometimes, when too many of our friends have missed the okay schedule, we speculate in whispers about the Voice.

We're just herders, not scientists or trainers. We know that even sharks can be conditioned to avoid certain things, like the schools they're supposed to be guarding. We know that hardware can be planted in a shark's brain to stimulate certain areas. It's like pulling a puppet's strings. But they don't tell us too much about how it works. We're just supposed to give the orders and

“There's something about hammerheads. They look like a cross between a nightmare and an abortion, but they have brains that can be conditioned and programmed to herd fish, just like any other shark.”

the Voice does the rest.

We do know about burn-out. The Voice is a clumsy tool. Repeated commands damage neural tissue, and sooner or later, usually within a year or two, the animal suffers brain death.

When the ocean ranges began to be managed and harvested intensively, when the big harvesting stations replaced the energy-hungry fishing fleets, herders used porpoises to steer the schools. Cetaceans are intelligent and can be trained. But they're also intelligent enough to resent being turned into slaves. Sometimes the whole pack would take off, leaving the herder with a scattering school and a hole in the harvesting plan.

So the scientists started cutting open the porpoises' heads and implanting their hardware. After all, there were quotas to meet.

Thank God that was stopped. It was like turning our brothers into zombies.

Sharks are just killing machines, ugly, vicious, unpredictable devourers, according to civilians. Yet, there isn't a herder who doesn't wish there was another way.

Burn-out.

I've seen it happen a few times. It's nothing dramatic but I've happened to be looking in the right direction once in a while. Just after a command, one shark gives a little quiver. That's it. Most of a shark's systems are so primitive that it's a while after brain death before the body gives up. But that quiver is the end. Even if the body continues to move, there's nothing there.

I guess every herder has had nightmares of looking down and seeing his own body quiver like that.

There is no hardware in a herder's head. The Voice only works one way.

That's what they tell us.

Why are there no old herders? Why are bodies almost never recovered, even when the ponies are intact?

I touched the switch on my mike and the box translated my words into a command for Tinkertoy to swim to the east and circle around the school. His appearance would keep it bunched up. And why was I thinking about waste? This school was a big one in spite of the loss of mass, so I should have plenty of time. I really needed a swim to wash off the stink of topside.

He swam away below the eyes of the pony, giving me a good view of sinuous locomotion. He seemed regretful. "Aw, Petey, I wanted to play!"

Cancel that. Erase. I don't know what he was thinking.

When Tinkertoy faded into the distance, I took a last look at the scopes and put the pony on automatic. I was slipping into the escape gear as I stepped down to the lock. The pony is home, but outside is heaven.

The touch of the water made me euphoric. I don't know what it is, but I feel more alive there than anywhere else. In a way it doesn't make sense because I'm completely dependent on the air packs. My senses are limited to vision—dim—and hearing—almost useless. I can't sense a pressure wave until it's too late to be any use. I can't taste/smell the odors in the water, probably the most important sense to fish. I can't swim very fast, and I have to depend on my suit to prevent dangerous loss of body heat. In the world under the surface I'm better prey than predator.

But I can move, glide, fly—effortlessly. I am part of the ocean, as it is a part of me.

I forgot about the air packs and the suit. I was alert and aware of the danger every second but it was unimportant. Every part of my body was functioning, not like being in the pony, or topside, where I am mostly useless meat supporting a brain that in turn functions as a puppet of the Atlantic Fisheries Corporation.

I swam from the lock directly into the school, counting on the pack's avoidance conditioning to protect me there. It is possible to swim with the pack, even to play with them if they've been fed recently. I've done it often. But around the pack you have to be doubly alert, and on this first swim after my return, I didn't want to be alert. Not that way.

Why do they force us to go topside for R and R every two weeks? I'd stay on the job forever if they'd keep giving me air packs. I'd take my R and R outside if they'd give me air packs. Why won't they turn us loose? Why keep binding us with their own fears? Maybe they're afraid we won't come back.

Change course. Think of something else. That's the way a shark would think.

Erase.

I soared through the school. It was like swimming through a shower of gigantic confetti that parted to make a path for me. They're even dumber than the sharks. If I'd been hungry I could have reached out and grabbed one.

I flew, trying to breathe shallowly, hoarding every breath in my pack.

Time was running out. I called my usual curse down on the heads of the Atlantic Fisheries Corporation and began my return to the pony. Thirty hours of air in a pack and one pack per pony. For emergency use only. I had to make this one last two weeks. Damn them. With this slender thread they hold me. Topsiders.

At the edge of the school I stopped dead in the water. Something had changed out there. The aura was different.

The pack was making its usual near-aimless sweeps, but they seemed nervous, their movements jerky. The school was calm, but then, the school is always calm until they approach the catch pens. I could see no predators. But something had changed. I could feel it.

Then I saw him. Gliding from the dimness at the edge of my vision. Tinkertoy.

He was returning from the east.

From the east. The shock raised my respiration rate but I no longer thought about hoarding the air in my pack. A shark cannot disobey a command. The puppet can't cut its own strings. Either a shark obeys or its brain is dead and it is not capable of initiating an action. But Tinkertoy was returning from the east. If he had finished his sweep, if my time sense could have been that far wrong, he would have returned from the northwest.

A shark could not disobey a command. But if something had changed since I gave Tinkertoy that last order, he would expect a new order. He could not function without the correct order. If predators were attacking the school on the east side, Tinkertoy could not complete his sweep and he could not attack without my command.

There must be predators in the school. It was the only explanation. If I'd been in the pony I would have seen them on the scopes. Alarms must have been flashing all across the board as I indulged in that forbidden pleasure.

Tinkertoy circled the pony, caressed it with his hide, tasting. "Here I am, Petey. What do you want me to do?"

My suit suddenly felt like a quilted overcoat. As long as I stayed where I was, Tinkertoy would not "see" me. His conditioning

blinded him to the main body of the school, to prevent him from lunging on the things he was supposed to protect. While I was hidden in the school I was safe, and the way he'd been acting, I needed that protection. Maybe he wouldn't attack me.

Maybe. But a friendly shark is no better than a hungry one. A flick of his tail could break my spine. A caress from that hide would rip away my suit and half my skin. Blood in the water would bring the rest of the pack down on me.

I had to get back to the pony. I had to find out what was hitting the school. If it was a few small sharks I could send the pack to attack. If it was more than the pack could handle, I might be able to save part of the school by turning it with the pony.

Tinkertoy rounded the pony's stern and started up the other side. I swam out of the school, trying to reach the lock before he made a complete circuit. No good. I threw out my arms to stop myself. He was soaring over the top, almost as if he'd planned this maneuver to trick me out of hiding.

"Petey! I've been looking all over for you!"

Erase. He just seemed a little excited, that's all. I didn't know what he was thinking. I swam back into the school and Tinkertoy lost interest again.

I felt dizzy. Hyperventilation. I had to slow down. I had to think.

I couldn't get back to the pony but I could swim *through* the school. At least get to the east and check out the situation for myself. I had no weapons, but if it was a small shark or a single porpoise—fat chance—I might be able to chase it away.

That still left the problem of getting back to the pony. But save that for later.

If I lost an entire school because I was outside, against regulations, I could get fired. Exiled topside for the rest of my life.

Forget that. Breathe slowly.

I couldn't go straight through the school or I'd lose my sense of direction. Fish all look alike and sections of the school are always changing orientation, though the school as a whole was heading north.

If I swam over the school and there were any wild sharks around, they might be drawn to attack. Even a careful diver makes some jerky movements and the closer these are to the surface, the more exciting to sharks.

I went under the school, gliding like a ray, inches from the bottom.

Swimming like that gives a diver a dangerous sense of power. It's not narcosis. Biochemistry has taken care of that. But the movement is almost effortless. You look down and you see the bottom passing so rapidly you feel jet propelled. The light is confusing.

The world was small enough to clasp in my arms.

I hadn't solved my problem; I was running away from it. And not from any sense of duty to the Atlantic Fisheries Corporation. My brain was a prisoner in an organism that had returned to its natural element.

Cancel that. Erase.

It wouldn't erase. I'd been a herder for years, using the Voice almost daily. If there was feedback, if the experts were wrong, my brain must be riddled with holes. Maybe I was as much a puppet as Tinkertoy. Who was pulling my strings? The Atlantic Fisheries Corporation? Or something older, more primitive?

I remembered what a sculptor said when asked about a piece of his work. "Why, I just took a block of marble and cut away everything that wasn't lion."

Cancel. Cancel. Cancel.

I was swimming to the east of the school to see if it was being attacked and by what. Cut off from my pony, I still had an obligation to my employer. I was protecting a vital food crop for millions of topsiders.

Oh, hell. That wasn't any better. Cancel.

I was trying to save my job, my life. My only opportunity to live where I belonged.

Why bother? I didn't care about the topsiders, the Atlantic Fisheries Corporation, or my job. Why not let it all slip away? I didn't have to go back to the pony.

Swimming was no longer effortless. I was moving fast, pushed by adrenalin. Thinking like a shark again. I didn't even bother to cancel that one.

When the school started to thin out, I rose just inside the curve of its flank, hoping it would cover me from whatever it was that had disturbed Tinkertoy. I could see nothing but the bottom, the fish, and the blue-green curtain at the edge of my vision.

Nothing. No sharks. No cetaceans.

I pushed out of the school and let my body drift north. The ocean was calm, as if nothing existed but the fish and me, suspended in the quiet. I decided I was still suffering from the effects of hyperventilation. I was seeing spots.

Or rather, one spot. I shook my head and looked straight at it. It didn't go away. It was a man-shaped thing hanging so deep within the curtain that I could hardly see it. But man-shaped. No air pack.

My breath went in and out; the school drifted away from me. I stared at the dark spot in the curtain while the world turned over and crushed something.

Maybe after years on the job, the Voice riddles a herder's brain with pinholes. Maybe we start to see things, imagine impossibilities.

Humans can't breathe water like fish. We can't survive underwater without complicated support systems, air packs. We have the word of the experts on that. That couldn't be a man out there, waving at me. No air packs. Impossible.

Cetaceans used to be land animals, too. Maybe something has been working on me like that sculptor, cutting away everything that isn't—what? I wanted to find out. I wanted to believe it was possible.

But there was my job. The world I knew, the packs and the pony and a fresh air pack every month.

The man-shaped thing beckoned.

I think I'm going to miss Tinkertoy. 

*Even out of prison, he really
wasn't free. A teleport
implant had made his body the
property of Lt. Denzlo.*

INVISIBLE STRIPE

BY RON GOULART

He ran. So they shot him.
Five kilguns hit him almost simultaneously,
slicing him into chunks.

Although everyone assumed his running was
an admission of guilt, Andy Stoker wasn't guilty.

Not this time.

But since the stranglings stopped when Andy
died, the case was officially closed. Nobody, or
hardly anyone rather, beside myself knows what
was really going on. By the time I had everything
figured out, Andy was dead and gone and I'm
certain the Greater Los Angeles Police Depart-
ment wouldn't believe me. Besides which, if I
went near the GLAPD fortress out in the Pasa-
dena Sector someone in the Murder Division
would be sure to find out. Can't risk that.

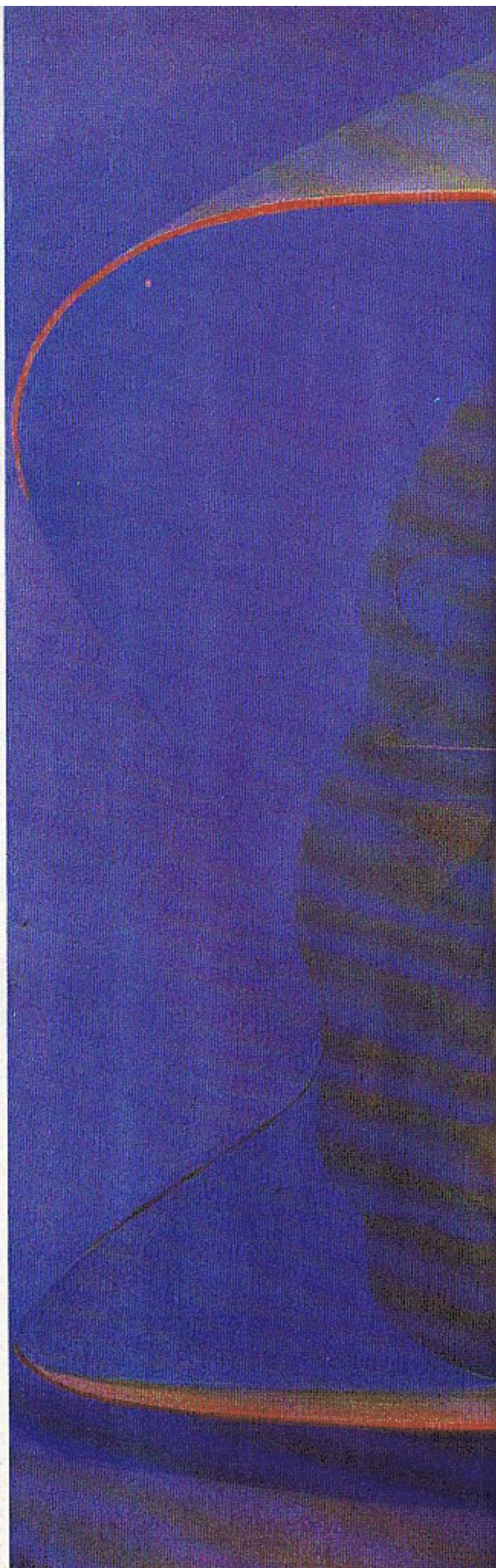
So you're the only person I'm going to tell
about Andy Stoker, about the stranglings and
who really committed
this particular batch of murders.

The first time I saw Andy in person was on a
hot bleary afternoon in August of 2005. He was
tugging off some of his clothes out in front of the
main building of the Quakeproof Studios in the
Burbank Sector of GLA.

Spotting him through the one-way window of
the tiny office OS was loaning me, I jumped up
and dived for the door.

"Musk," rumbled the dented robot sec-
retary that went with the office.

PAINTING BY ERNST FUCHS





"Beg pardon?" I hesitated, anxious, on the threshold.

"Hair note save. War musk."

"Oh, right." I dashed back to my floating metal desk, snatched up the breather, and clapped it to my face.

"Half a hobby die," chuckled the old bot as I headed out again.

Back in the Connecticut Enclave where I live, the air is usually breathable, so I wasn't in the habit of wearing a protective mask. When I first hit the glaring afternoon outside, the tinted goggles seemed to go black for several seconds. By the time I could see again Andy had his tunic off and was slapping at his bare chest.

The android security guard, a baffled expression on his cream-color face, was holding his stun gun at the ready.

"It's okay," I called, running in the direction of the security huts. "He's my guest."

"Just look at that, will you?" Andy ordered the guard, tracing a finger over the certificate tattooed on his flesh. "They did program you to read, didn't they? This states I graduated, with honors, from the Pasadena Playhouse for the Criminally Insane. I'm absolutely clean now. No matter what the Murder Division may have told—"

"You got to have a pass," the humanoid guard insisted. "I'm not all that interested in your body, sir, nor in its decorations. Your criminal past is so much water over the dam so far as my duties—"

"Hey, he's all right!" I said. "He's here to see me." I had reached them.

The guard cupped his gunfree hand to his metal ear. "Eh?"

Andy reached over, gave my breather a thump with his fist. "You shouldn't wear an American brand mask," he advised. "Especially one of these clunky GEs. They garble your speech, let in enough airborne carcinogens to kill the average lab rat in about fifteen—"

"Ah, I recognize you, sir, by the New England cut of your two-piece daysuit," the guard said to me. "Very Ivy League, now that I make it out through the haze. You're the gentleman from Oldies, Ltd."

"Exactly," I shouted through my mouthpiece. "This is Andy Stoker, came to work as a technical adviser on a nostalgia show we're doing entitled *Fabled Pattern Killers of Yesteryear*."

"I happen to be a pattern killer myself," Andy told the guard, grinning. "Relatively famous, about five years ago, as Captain Midnight. So called because I always struck at exactly—"

"My memories only go back two years, sir," said the android. "In show business, that's sufficient. Famous murderer, were you?"

"I strangled nine people, made the covers of *Timelife* and *Mammon* in the same week," Andy stopped to grab up his discarded tunic.

I noticed a nasty reddish lump on his back, but didn't comment on it. "Come along, Andy," I said, catching hold of his arm. "I'll show you the sets they're building

for the production."

Andy continued to address the mechanical guard. "I was the best-known video-induced criminal of the year, although I'm less famous these days. Except to the darn Murder Division of the Greater Los Angeles Pol—"

"You'll vouch for him, sir?" the guard asked me.

"He doesn't have to," answered Andy. "I'm clean now." He poked at the tattooed diploma. "I won't strangle anyone, ever again. Unless I happen to be goaded into it by a suggestively violent television show. Since, however, I'm forbidden by the terms of my parole to own, operate, or even look at a TV set, a disksyst, or a vidwall, there's very little—"

"The sets, Andy," I hurried him away across the bright, hazy grounds of the video studio. Ever since he'd criticized my breather I'd felt the thick air was sneaking in and seeping out of my lungs and doing them harm. "They're all indoors."

●What is that thing?

I asked, referring to an inflamed reddish lump.

"That's my teleport box. They let me loose, but they stuck me with this . . . which means I'm wearing invisible stripes."

"I'm sorry I lost the pass you sent me," he said as we rapidly walked toward Studio C. "It fell out of my pocket while I was upside down over the Grand Canyon."

"Why were you in that position?"

Andy was a long, lanky young man of about 29, and, being several inches taller than I, leaned down now and lowered his voice. "It's got to do with romance," he confided through the mouthpiece of his Japanese-made breather.

"How does the Grand Canyon—"

"Don't you read *Fax-Variety*?"

"I have to."

"Then you ought to have noticed the item about Dynamite Dunn and myself being a new twosome."

"Dynamite Dunn, the lady daredevil?"

"There aren't that many Dynamite Duns in the world. She's who I mean. Didn't you read the tremendous writeup they gave her in *WomenStunts* last week, or the rave notice in *Stunt Persons* a couple months ago? I suppose, being head over heels in love, I'm prejudiced about Dynamite's stunts, but to me she's the best-looking girl in the Suicidal Stunt field."

"In here." I pushed open the door of the

sound stage, and we entered.

Andy tugged off his mask. "You ought to get yourself one of these Nusubito Breathers. The Japanese really know how to make the things. Their air was unbreathable way before ours. Back when I was strangling fulltime I used an American make and found it too—"

"How did you happen to be over the Grand Canyon?"

"Oh, Dynamite's planning a stunt that involves her being seduced by three . . . this is London in the nineteenth century, right?"

We'd entered the dimly lit set, which represented a block of the East End of Victorian London. "Going to use it in our 'Jack the Ripper' sequence."

"Messy, Jack the Ripper was messy," observed Andy, slowing and gazing around. "Strangling is much neater. If I were, which I assure you I never will, going to kill anybody again, I'd sure use strangulation."

I took, even though he seemed pleasant and calm enough, a few steps back from him. "We don't have to talk about your crimes if it upsets—"

"They weren't crimes," Andy said, grinning. "Which is what made my case so famous. I was judged, by both a six-person human jury and a three-member robot backup jury, to be video susceptible. In fact, I've got one of the worst and most severe kinds. I'd always been strongly goaded by what I saw on our TV wall as a kid. Broke a leg one summer trying to emulate Hunneker the Jungle Man, came very close to fracturing my head after viewing *The Girl with the Iron Skull*." Those little incidents were only preludes, and then on that fateful night in 2000 I chanced to watch 'The Case of the Barchester Strangler' on *Bently of Scotland Yard*, and off I went. Strangled nine helpless victims before the GLAPD ran me to ground. Always did it at midnight, like the killer on the show, hence my nickname of Captain Midnight. Coined by the media." He lifted up the front of his tunic, studied the tattooed diploma. "I'm cured now, though, which is why I was let out on parole two years ago. I'm fine so long as I keep absolutely clear of TV. I haven't, give you my word, harmed a soul since I've been out. Too busy for crime anyhow, what with my consulting work and my courtship of Dynamite."

"I thought I saw in the *National Intruder* where Dynamite was sleeping with someone on the GLA police force."

"Oh, that item you noticed, huh?" Scowling, Andy shuffled along the shadowy London lane. "I honestly believe her affair with Denzlo is only another stunt. No, sir, the one true love in Dynamite's life is me. Being shot out of a solar cannon while a gorilla is ravaging you . . . stunts like that take a lot out of a person. Sometimes, I have to admit, Dynamite seeks relaxation in odd places. Nothing to worry about, though." He hoisted the tunic farther, reached around, and tapped at his back.

There was that slightly inflamed lump again, rectangular and about the size of a pocket computer. It was rimmed by reddish flesh, stuck up almost a half inch. "What is that thing?"

"Didn't you read the bio sheet I sent? That's my teleport box," he explained. "Ugly thing, and it itches like crazy most of the time. They let me loose, but they stuck me with this. So I'm metamorphically wearing invisible stripes."

"Who implanted that?"

"Talk about coincidence, it was Denzlo," Andy replied. "He ordered the job done, that is. Perfectly within his rights, since I am a paroled killer, under the Roaming Murderers Act of 2002. Yet the great state of California South says it's okay to bury one of these teleport gadgets in any potentially dangerous killer. I've talked it over, you can bet, with my attorney many times. He's not a bad guy, a robot, but built by the Japanese, loaded with legal lore and possessed of a really golden voice."

Nodding at his back, I asked, "They can summon you with that gadget?"

"Well, the law says only once in any given week unless there's an emergency situation." He chuckled, let his tunic fall, and then scratched at the implanted teleporter. "Denzlo treats almost anything as an emergency. Oh, let me warn you now it's come up. What with these Media Killer slayings going on, the lieutenant's been yanking me into the Murder Division offices for questioning as often as twice a day. In case I should go whooshing away in the middle of our conversation, don't take it as an insult. See, I don't actually have any control over what he—"

"Who's the Media Killer?"

"They don't know. Denzlo'd like it to be me, so he'd have, in his cockeyed opinion, a clear field with Dynamite."

"I wasn't talking about identity. I'm just not familiar with the case at all."

"You really are steeped in the past. Working for Oldies, Ltd., has—"

Zimm!

A harsh, tinny buzz was coming out of him, originating in his back.

Zimm!

"Again? They're really harass—"

Then Andy wasn't there anymore. He vanished, as though he'd been sucked suddenly into another world. The air where he'd been standing gave off a faint popping sound after he'd gone teleporting away—to Lt. Denzlo and the GLAPD.

Andy didn't get back to me until two days later. Part of the time he was in the police fortress in the Pasadena Sector, the rest he spent with Dynamite Dunn. She'd given up her plans for the Grand Canyon and was contemplating a daredevil stunt involving the Nixon Dam. Even though Andy was a certified video stimulation criminal who'd been cleared and pronounced socially acceptable by the Pasadena Playhouse for the Criminally Insane, the GLA had been able to have a teleport unit surgically im-

planted in him. This allowed them to whisk him in for questioning up to six times in any given month. Andy swore, which I'm inclined to believe, that once he quit watching TV he never strangled anyone else. Denzlo and his partner, Hart, didn't believe him, apparently. They were working very hard to pin the Media Killer stranglings on him, which is why they'd teleported him off once again while he was visiting me at the studio.

They were very unconventional cops, Denzlo and Hart. In their early 30s, both lean and dark. They went in for conservative one-piece gray day suits, close-cropped hair, and no visible body decorations at all. Outside of a fondness for teleporting parolees and ex-cons into the Interrogation Pits, neither of them went in much for gadgets. They never used the Shockbox or the Fingerpopper, stayed away from Talkjuice and Brainprobing. Their approach was classic 20th century. Hart yelled and Denzlo was softspoken.

"We know you did it!" Hart shouted at Andy the instant he materialized in the sea-green Query Cell that afternoon.

Andy put out a hand to steady himself. As many times as he'd been yanked hither and yon by the teleport unit in his back, he still got a shade woozy. "Did what?"

"Don't scream at the guy," said Denzlo in his soft, droning voice. "He'll tell us without that."

"Oh, will he?"

"Sure, he will." Denzlo circled the slightly swaying Andy.

"What about Dr. Bubbles?" cried Hart, hopping once.

"Who?" Andy reached a floating wale-back chair and sat, uninvited. "You're hauling me in too many times, by the way. I want to contact my robot attorney over in—"

"Only the guilty need robots!"

"Take it easy, Hart. Andy's going to confess any minute now."

"Some things I don't mind your fudging about," Andy told them. "But I'm not going to let you teleport me more than the—"

"Look at this!" From behind his back Hart produced a small metal arm and thrust it at Andy.

He recoiled. "What the heck is that?"

"You recoil like a guilty man!"

"Thought you were going to poke me in the eye with those teeny metal fingers. Is that part of some toy?" He was bewildered.

"You do a very nice innocent act, Andy," said Lt. Denzlo, smiling admiringly. "No wonder they call you the Media Killer, you're a real performer."

"Ah, so there's been another one of those." Andy nodded. "Well, I didn't do this one either."

"It's your M.O.!"

"Hundreds of people have my M.O. I mean, all I ever did back when I was a killer was put my hands on their neck and squeeze. Nothing fancy."

"Do you deny you used to watch Dr.



"Even in death, it commands attention."

Bubbles on TV? Do you deny that you strangled the poor old guy early this morning at the Hollywood Home for Washed-Up Actors?"

"I don't watch any TV," said Andy patiently. "You guys know that. If I ever did again, I'd do... Lord knows what."

"So you claim," said Denzlo in his calm voice. "We think you fooled the courts of California South five years ago, Andy."

"But you won't fool us!"

"Is that part of Dr. Bubbles?" Andy pointed to the little metal arm Hart was swinging in the air. "Must have been a small man with a—"

"This is a part of one of his pathetic little Knowbots!"

"Don't you recall watching the *Dr. Bubbles & His Knowbots Show* in your youth, Andy? It ran on the National Thoughtful Network for several seasons, taught a heck of a lot of kids how to... what's that on your tunic collar?"

"Is it blood?"

"Probably lipstick," answered Andy. "You ought to recognize the shade, Denzlo. Dynamite has it made up especially for her. Calls it Hazardous Crimson because—"

"You still claim to be seeing this Miss Dunn?"

"Claim? I'm head over heels in love with her. I worship every devil-may-care bone in her bod—"

"That'll be enough of that kind of talk."

"My partner respects Miss Dynamite Dunn! He intends to wed her, to sign a long-term marriage agreement. He doesn't care to hear cringing stranglers defile her repu—"

"The only time I've cringed today is when you poked that goofy arm in my eye. That'd make anybody—"

"You deny cringing, but not the strangler part?"

"I'm not a strangler either. We all know I used to be one, but with help I got over it."

"Where were you this morning?"

"At the Grand Canyon."

"An odd place to be," Hart made a few more hops. "Did anyone see you there?"

"Certainly, Lieutenant. Besides Dynamite, there was the crew from the ABCBS-TV network and a reporter from *WomenStunts* and a pudgy guy I think might have been the Vice President of the United States and... oh, lots of people. Whenever Dynamite practices one of her death-defying stunts, there's usually a crowd." Andy looked from one cop to the other. "Tell you something funny, too. By accident I happened to get just a tiny glance at a TV monitor screen and there was a picture of Dynamite doing a practice jump over a small ditch. First thing I knew, I was running and then making a jump myself. See, when I so much as look at anything on TV —"

"Too bad you didn't jump in the canyon!"

"No, he wouldn't do that," said Denzlo. "He's a fake. He convinced a six-person jury and an outmoded computer judge he's a severe vidstim case. I don't buy any of it."

"Do you think," suggested Andy, "it's be-

cause you're trying to steal Dynamite away from me that you —"

"We'll let you go for now, Andrew. I promise you I'll be checking out your alibi." Denzlo turned his back on him.

"You can go!" Hart strode to the teleport control board in the corner of the room. "Where to?"

"Since you've fouled up my job interview, you may as well send me home to my place."

Denzlo, very softly, said, "You're still very high on our suspect list."

"Don't strangle anyone else!"

"I don't strangle people any —"

Zimm!

He was in his cluster apartment in the Santa Monica Sector. He materialized five feet off the see-through floor. He fell now and banged his knee. That had probably been deliberate on Hart's part.

"He's trying to frame me," Andy insisted when I met him for lunch a few days later at

*• Hundreds of people
have my M.O.
I mean, all I ever did
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a killer was put my
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their neck and squeeze.
Nothing fancy. •*

the Edge O'The Fault restaurant in the Aladena Sector.

Since there was something slightly wrong with the microwave unit on my side of the table, I was preoccupied with the way my knees were heating up. "Who?" I asked finally.

"Lieutenant Denzlo. Initially it was harassment. Teleport me into the police fortress, question me, teleport me out. Now it's grown worse."

"How?" I found if I kept my knees tight together it was all right.

"You fidget a lot. I used to myself, back in the days when I watched TV. You ought to consider seriously dropping —"

"My knees were cooking, that's all. I can't stop watching television, since my work —"

"Well, about what Denzlo's up to. He's consumed with jealousy, as I believe I've mentioned. Dynamite informs me that when they're together he devotes much of his time to ranting over me. 'How's your killer friend?' or 'Does he like to put his hands on your throat when you're hugging?' And other snide stuff in that vein. I tell you, once you get labeled a strangler, it's just too bad."

"Dynamite tells you what happens between her and this police officer?"

"Sure, why not? We're deeply in love."

"Not enough for her to drop Denzlo."

"She'd like to, believe me, except she's somewhat fearful," explained Andy, tapping the menu screen on his microwave unit. "Is the frozen kelploaf any good here?"

"No."

"Look, if Denzlo isn't able to frame me, he may use his authority to make trouble for Dynamite. She has to keep dating the guy."

"Maybe the safest thing would be for you and this lady daredevil to part."

"I'm not a coward, like people in your line of work have to be. No man who can accompany Dynamite on many of her most dangerous feats is a coward. I'm not about to let —"

"No one's ever called me a coward either, Andy. In fact, when I was visiting Burt Lancaster at the Old Acrobats Home in Taos to sign him up for —"

"Denzlo planted one of my watches at the scene."

"Scene of a crime?"

Slowly Andy nodded. "The last so-called Media Killer strangling, yes. Fellow named Mercenary Mazurky — maybe you've heard of him? Used to be a freelance soldier and was holding down the Invasion Desk on the Intensive News Hour on KLOB-TV."

"I think Mazurky pixphoned me a couple weeks ago, wanted me to enter this upcoming Clean Air Marathon to —"

"That's the guy. They're staging a ten-mile jog to raise money to clean up the air hereabouts. If you do enter, be sure you wear a better mask than the one you use or —"

"I'm not entering. I came out to GLA to produce the documentary on famous pattern killers of bygone days. Running isn't —"

"This Media Killer fellow apparently strangled poor Mazurky in the sky-car lot behind KLOB over in the Westwood Sector late last night," Andy continued. "This time, I didn't happen to be with anybody. Dynamite was taping an interview with an Alistair Cooke clone for the National Thoughtful Network. I was home not watching TV. Heck, I don't even have a set, be a parole violation if I did. Thing is, Denzlo claims my watch was spotted in the shrubs near the murder site."

"How'd it get there?"

"Denzlo put it there, after swiping it out of my dwelling," answered Andy. "The guy's intent on getting rid of me as a rival. He'll try anything."

"Mazurky was a freelance commando, wasn't he?"

"So they say."

"Big guy, very tough."

"Exactly." Leaning toward me, Andy lowered his voice. "You're wondering how the strangler snuck up on him."

"It occurred to me, yeah."

"Killer had to be somebody Mazurky knew," Andy grinned. "I told Denzlo and Hart as much this morning when they teleported me in for grilling. Yanked me right

out of a warm, comfortable bed."

"Why'd they let you go?"

"My robot attorney sprung me, but there's no telling how long before—"

Zimm!

"Damn, he's at it ag—"

Andy was teleported away.

I looked down at my warm lap, not exactly wanting to meet the glances of the other restaurant customers.

That lunch turned out to be the last time I personally encountered Andy Stoker.

Oldies, Ltd., got a tip that the last living Elvis Presley impersonator was living in a welfare commune in New Yazoo, Mississippi. They ordered me to teleport down there, see if I could locate the singer and sign him up for one of our nostalgia tours. We calculated he'd fit perfectly into a package we were putting together to star Conway Twitty and the very talented young girl who pushed his wheelchair. Accordingly, I turned over the pattern killer documentary to an assistant and went popping off to Mississippi. Teleporting, even when it isn't unexpected like Andy's and you use a conventional teleport depot pad, can do things to you. The side effects of that, plus two weeks of tracking the elusive Presley lookalike, landed me in a yogurt therapy spa in Free Europe 22.

By the time I emerged, nearly recovered, Andy was dead. The specifics of what happened I can only guess at. As I've told you before, though, I'm very good at making a complete projection from a minimum of data. Therefore, I'm willing to bet, the rest of this is fairly close to the truth. I did attempt, when next I was in California South, to compare some of my conclusions with Dynamite Dunn's. She was tied up in plans for her wedding to Lt. Denzlo, claimed no time to talk to me. You may have seen the subsequent wedding on TV, with the bride and groom consummating the marriage on a trampoline suspended over the Grand Canyon.

Andy's attorney, whom I did have a chance to interview just prior to his being scrapped, told me he'd been able to prove that the watch found at the scene of Mazurky's strangling was stolen from Andy's apartment three days prior to the crime. When the next victim, a salesman of electronic stimulation gear out in the San Fernando Sector, fellow named Paranoid Piet, was found strangled and clutching a lock of Andy's hair, it looked bad. However, the robot lawyer established the fact that the hair came not directly off Andy's head but from the waste compartment of the robot barber he visited.

At about the time of the Paranoid Piet strangling Andy received some unsettling news from Dynamite. Unsettling hints actually.

Andy was visiting Dynamite in her home gym this particular afternoon. The red-haired girl, wearing an attractive one-piece stuntsuit, was swinging from a plyrope up

near the domed see-through ceiling.

Jogging along beneath her, Andy was saying, "There's only one person who can be doing this to me. You realize that, don't you, Dyna?"

"You're letting your silly old jealousy feelings make you—"

"Come on. It's got to be Denzlo. He's got motive and opportunity. He's the one framing me."

"Andy, you—"

Thunk!

He dashed across the padded floor to the place where the fallen girl hit. "You usually don't fall off things, Dyna," he said as he knelt beside her. "Something's bothering you."

The pretty girl groaned some, shook her head, and then sat up to hug him. "Andy, I suspect it's worse even than you imagine."

"Worse?" He stroked her fiery hair.

"Denzlo's been dropping hints lately," she said, sighing. "Wish he wouldn't, since it makes me gosh-awful nervous. Not only

● *Oldies, Ltd., got a tip that the last living Elvis Presley impersonator was living in a welfare commune. They ordered me to teleport down, see if I could locate the singer, and sign him up for one of our nostalgia tours.* ●

have I been falling from some pretty high places lately. I've been screwing up other stunts, too. Last week when they shot me out of the neutron cannon to celebrate opening the new kelpfood plant out in the Oxnard Sector, my trajectory was way off. I ended up landing smack dab in the middle of a pile of—"

"What about Denzlo? What's he been insinuating to you?"

"I honestly to gosh think he is trying to frame you for these Media Killer crimes, Andy."

"I been telling you that for weeks, Dyna."

"On top of which. . . . Golly, I have the spookiest feeling he. . . ." She let out a longer, sadder sigh.

Andy pushed her away from him. "I get what you mean," he said, eyes widening. "Denzlo is not only providing clues which point to me, he's providing the victims. Isn't that it?"

She nodded her lovely red-topped head. "Gosh, I'm afraid it is. What'll you do?"

"Stop him!"

"How? He's really smart, and powerful."

"Suppose," mused Andy, "I were, completely by unavoidable accident, of course,

to view this upcoming documentary on pattern killers that Oldies, Ltd., put together. I'd be compelled to rush out and—"

"Andy, you're supposed to be cured."

"I am cured. You saw my diploma from—"

"Yes, don't bother showing me the darn thing again." She put her small warm hands on his. "What I mean is, golly, you shouldn't be having thoughts about running amok. Strangling a bunch of people like you—"

"Not people, Dyna, only Denzlo," he explained, grinning. "Actually, I won't watch the show. If I really watched it I might, as you put it, run amok, because I still am very susceptible to anything I see on television. I'll only say, when they come to arrest me for strangling Denzlo, that I was watching. Most I'll get is another few—"

"I don't like the drift of this darn old conversation," the lady daredevil told him. "Wow, do I pick 'em. A rogue cop and a dumb bunny who tells me he's going to go out and commence choking innocent—"

"Didn't I promise you no innocent people this time? Only Denzlo, then I quit. Promise." He made a cross over his heart. "I really won't—"

Zimm!

"Again? Oh, Andy."

"We still have our dinner—"

Zimm!

She managed one quick kiss on his cheek before he went teleporting off.

Andy didn't land in the police fortress this time. Denzlo, probably with the cooperation of Hart, had teleported him elsewhere.

To the scene of the latest strangling.

They'd landed Andy there only minutes after the murder. No one was there as yet. Only the dead man and Andy.

"Talk about frameups," he said.

This was in the Pasadena Sector. The victim was a man named Reisberson. He was sprawled on the floor of his place of business, feet spread wide.

Reisberson ran a TV wall store, which was filled with sample walls. Each wall showed an ongoing television show.

Ten seconds after he saw the dead man, Andy looked up at the nearest of the huge TV pictures.

"... an excitement in the air ...," an unseen announcer was saying. "All for a very good cause, too, which must make all the folks who're about to participate in this Clear Air Marathon very happy."

The same picture was on all the giant wallsize screens that surrounded Andy. Hundreds of runners waiting for the signal to start.

A door behind him opened, feet came thumping in.

"Stay right where you are, Media Killer!" an official-sounding voice ordered. "We'll cut you in slices! Don't move!"

Andy, though, really was susceptible to what he saw on television. At that moment on all those enormous screens people began to run. There was nothing else Andy could do.

He ran. So they shot him. ☐





PAINTING BY CHRIS MOORE

*Next to these, the pyramids
look like chopped liver*

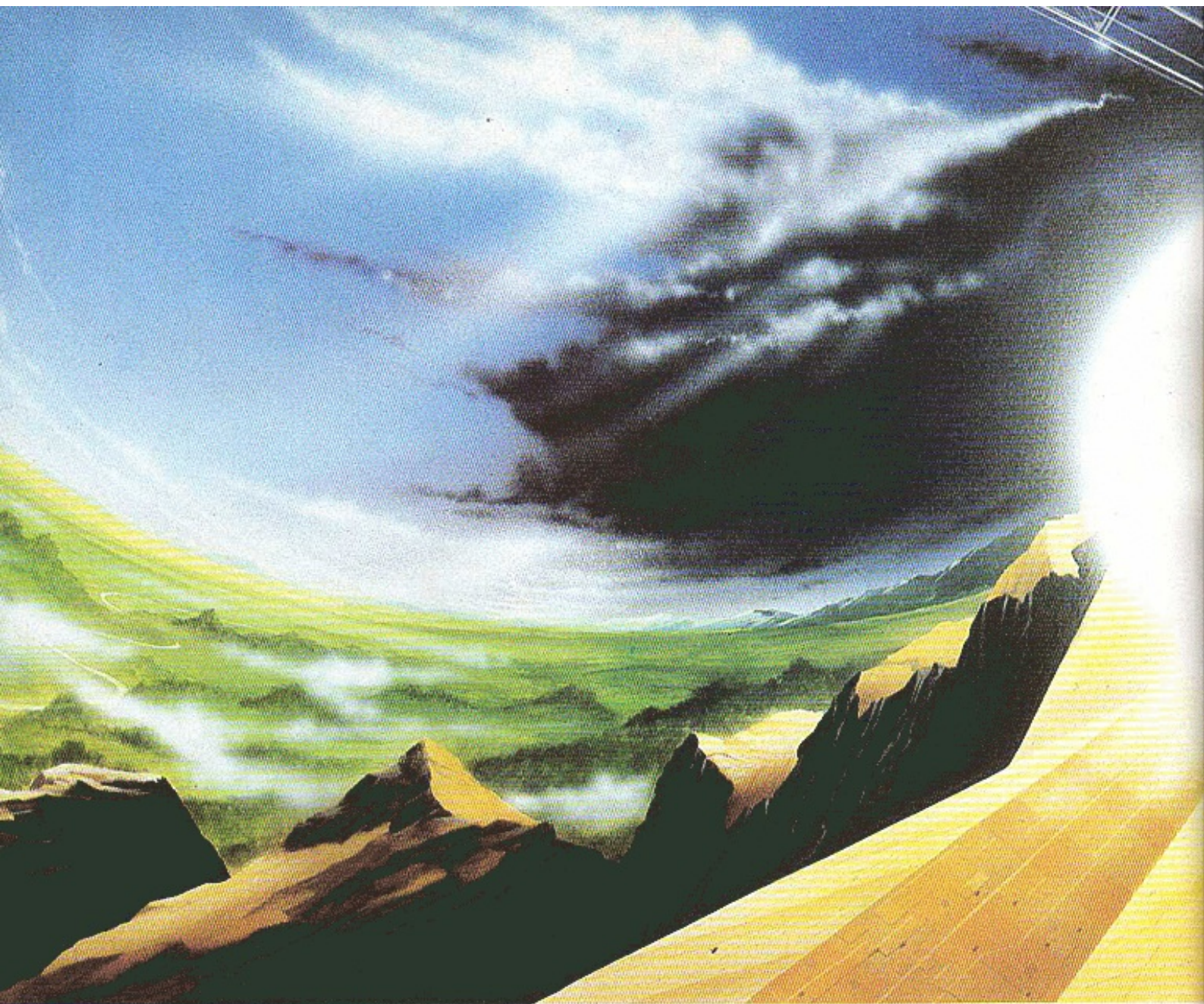
7 WONDERS OF THE UNIVERSE

BY PHILIP DUNN

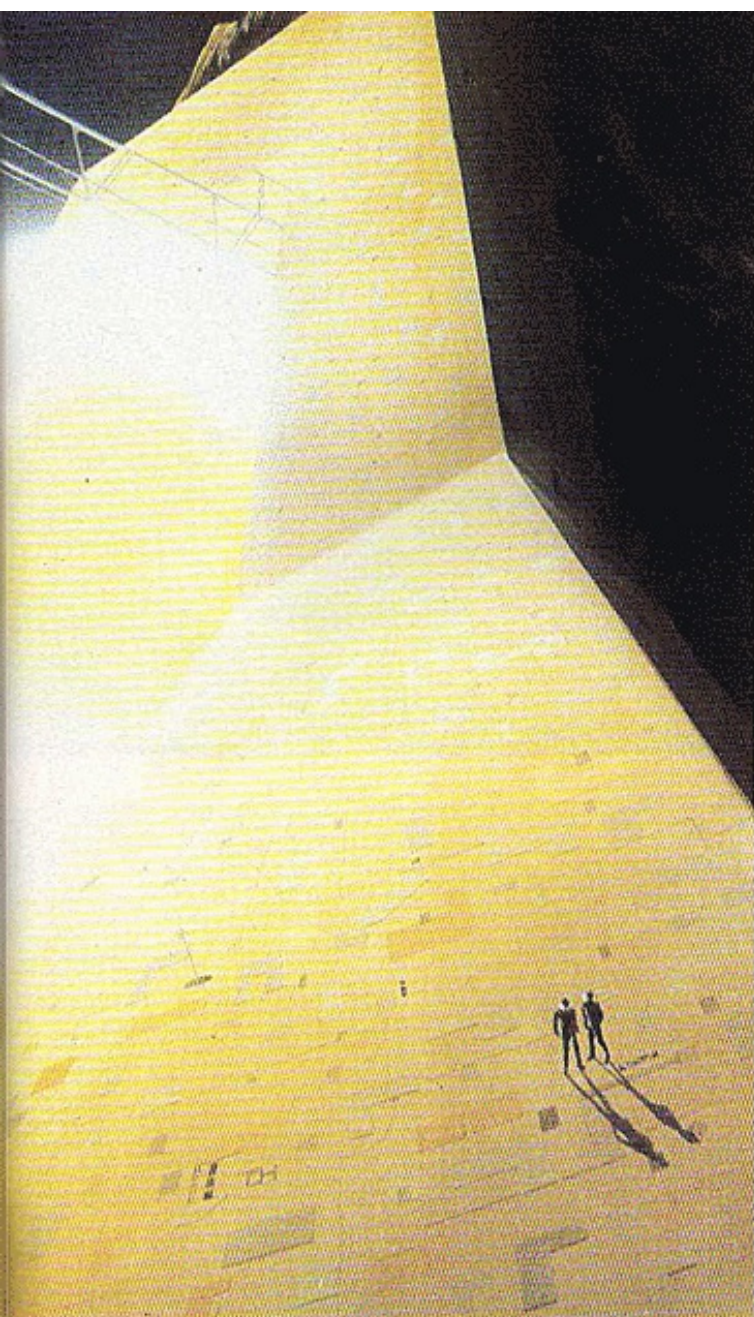
In the second century B.C. that great travel writer of antiquity Antipater of Sidon described the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Unfortunately, except for the pyramids of Egypt, these sights had all been destroyed by the twelfth century. The tourist trade has gone downhill ever since. Our ancestors gazed upon the Colossus of Rhodes and the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus. Today we settle for Disney World.

But no more! Looking ever outward, we at *Omni* commissioned Dr. Jason D'Argonaut to search the far reaches of the universe in his starship for some decent tourist attractions. He returned recently, bearing with him two remarkable documents. The first was his expense account, which would have paid for the Olympian Zeus 50 times over. (Our accountants called it "the golden fleece.") The second was the portfolio of intergalactic wonders on these pages—which we now proclaim as the Seven Wonders of the *Universe*:

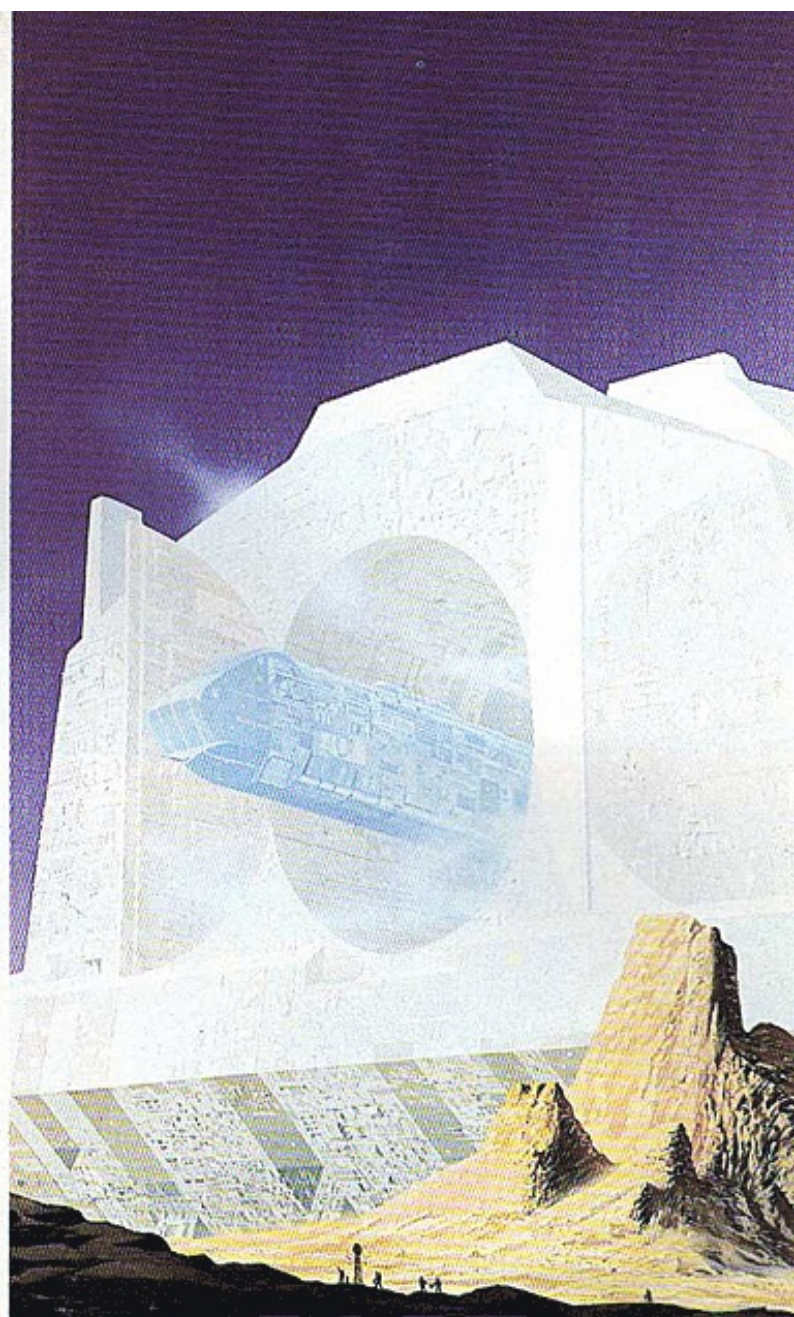
The YONKERS AIRPORT (left) is the only earthbound sight of the seven. Dr. D'Argonaut was able to photograph it, using an InstaMatic equipped with a Zikon time-warp motor-drive, which produces snapshots up to four millennia in the future. Built just a few miles north of New York City in the year 3225, the airport was the indirect result of a tremendous population explosion that put ground space at a premium. The theory behind its construction was that if an area of land the size of Kennedy International Airport were built vertically, it would have to be 17 miles high. Thus, the 17-mile-high Yonkers Airport, with its 82 levels of runway. Though inconvenient for late passengers rushing to catch a plane at an upper level, the airport does allow aircraft to take off directly into their correct atmospheric levels.



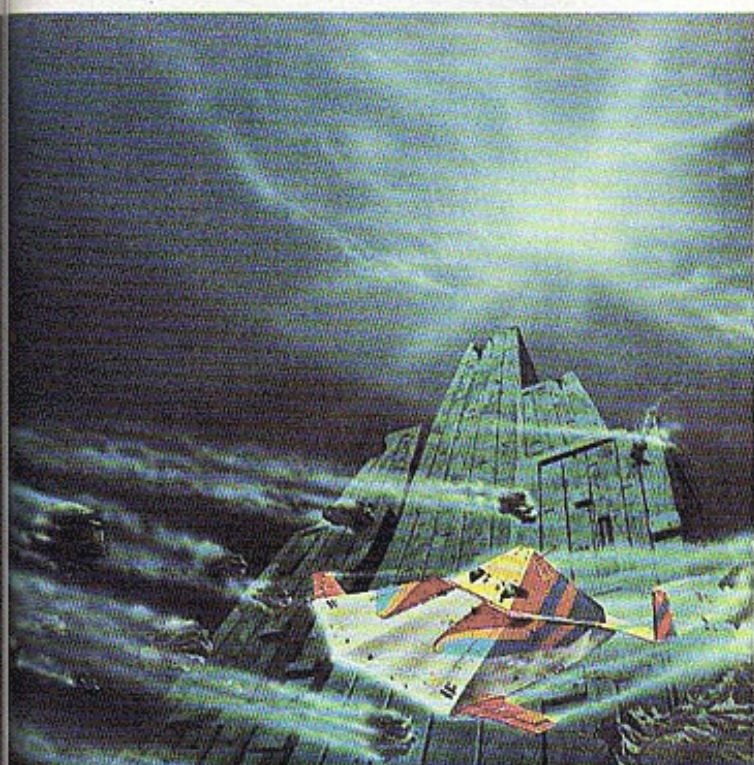
On the planet Titchen, in the Hesparaggortan star system, light travels at only 145,543 miles per second, instead of the normal 186,281. Thus, the LIGHT DAMS OF HESPARAGGORTA (above) were built, using mirror surfaces to bring the light back to proper speed. The UFO MUSEUM (right), located on the planet Tauceria, houses thousands of hovering space machines. The Taucerians are preoccupied with Earth, having extensive maps of the planet and records of ancient visitations here. Tauceria's culture resembles that of the Aztecs, with burial customs not unlike those of the ancient Egyptians. The DOORS OF LAUNCH (above right) are the portals of the universe's largest spaceship hangar, which became obsolete centuries ago because of energy shortages.



PAINTING BY COLIN HAY



PAINTING BY ANGUS MCKIE

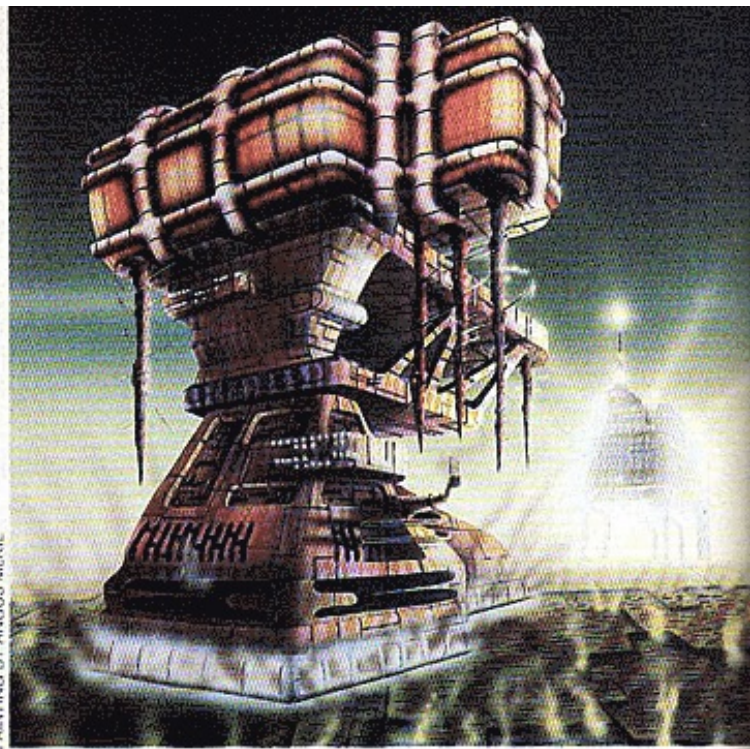


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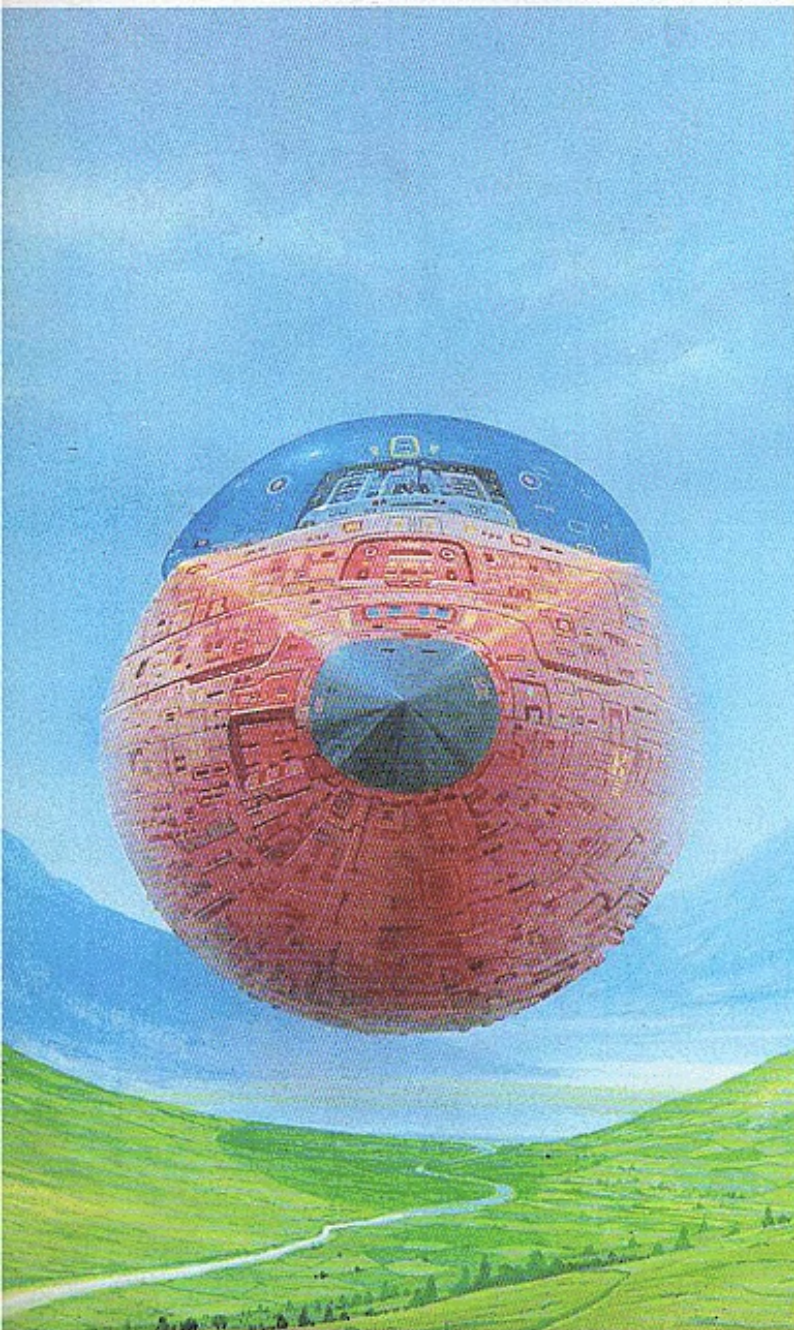
•The Doors of Launch stand four kilometers from the ground. The hangar itself measures 4,600 square kilometers and was built when subatomic fuel was still cheap and muon-guzzling space limousines were gigantic. •

When the great forces
of the Black Hole of Ngran
threatened to destroy
the planet Straff, Dr. Thurgood
Waverny built an anti-
gravity system to save the
people. The result: the
blimplike City of Waverny.

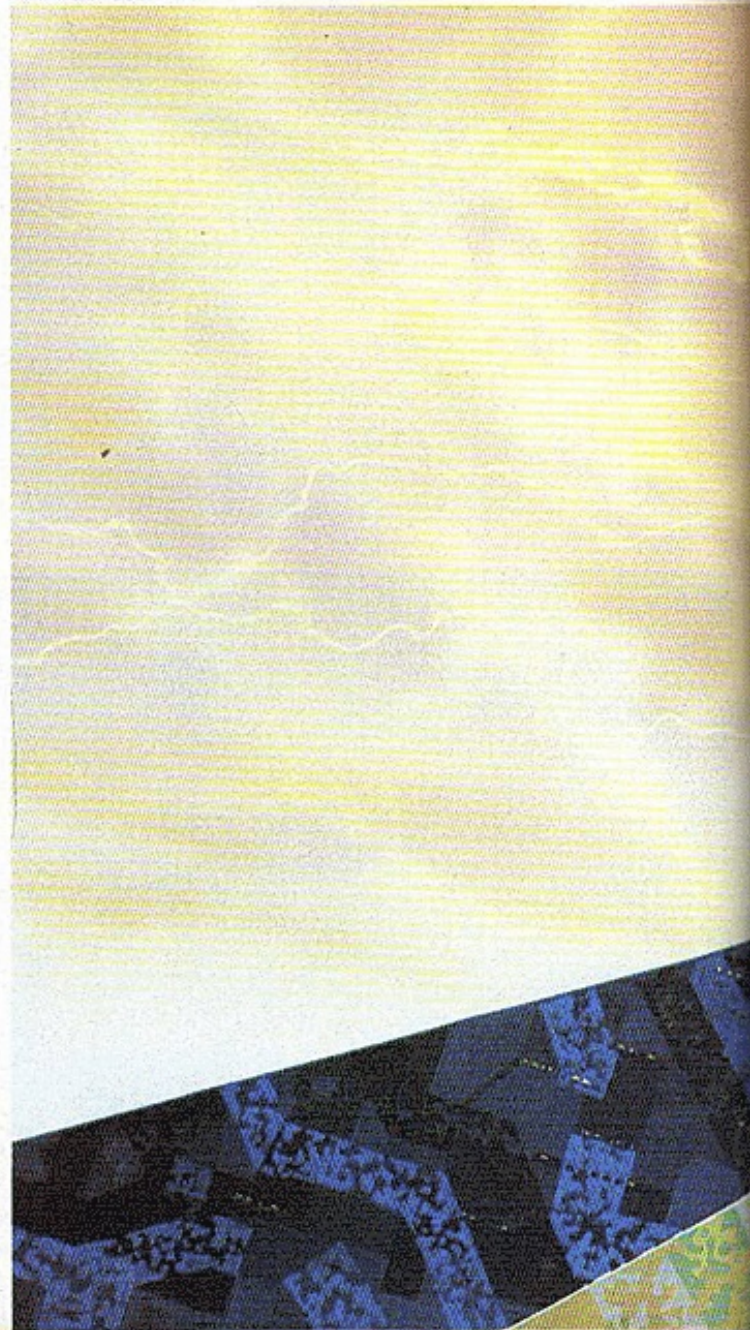
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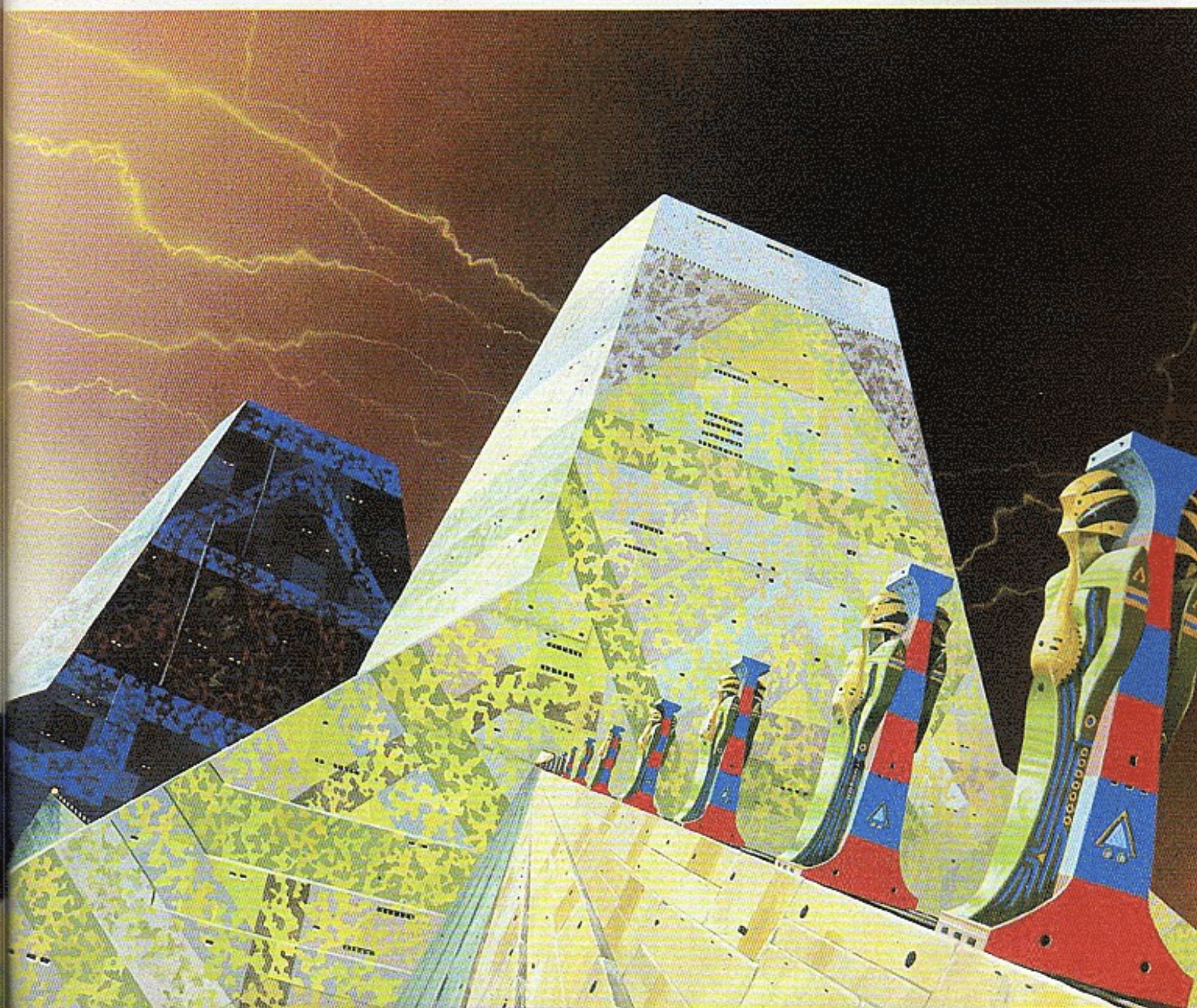
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PAINTING BY COLIN HAY



The BRIDGES OF GRIEF (below) make the Hanging Gardens of Babylon look like potted plants. Straddling the three moons of the planet Perian, the bridges are adorned with Egyptian-like statues every 100 meters along their 108-million-kilometer length. They are so named because they are tattooed repeatedly with the word *grief*. What this means, no one knows. The TEGGLADORN (left) is one of 80,000 such devices used on the planet Concorde for decomposing any substance, including humans, into subatomic particles to be transmitted to another Tegladorn. You simply stand beneath it and push a button. The FLOATING CITY OF WAVERNY (far left) is a self-supporting metropolis that floats in an orbit 3,000 kilometers above the surface of the planet Straff. **DO**



*They would resurrect and kill him
again and again—until he repented.*

A THOUSAND DEATHS

BY ORSON SCOTT CARD

"You will make no speeches," said
the prosecutor.

"I didn't expect they'd let me,"
Jerry Crove answered, affecting a
confidence he didn't feel. The
prosecutor was not hostile; he
seemed more like a high school
drama coach than a man who was
seeking Jerry's death.

"They not only won't let you," the
prosecutor said, "but if you try
anything, it will go much worse for
you. We have you cold, you know.
We don't need anywhere near as
much proof as we have."

"You haven't proved anything."
"We've proved you knew about it,"
the prosecutor insisted mildly. "No
point arguing now. Knowing about
treason and not reporting it is exactly
equal to committing treason."

Jerry shrugged and looked away.
The cell was bare concrete. The
door was solid steel. The bed was a
hammock hung from hooks on the
wall. The toilet was a can with a

removable plastic seat. There was
no conceivable way to escape.
Indeed, there was nothing that could
conceivably occupy an intelligent
person's mind for more than five
minutes. In the three weeks he had
been here, he had memorized every
crack in the concrete, every bolt in
the door. He had nothing to look at,
except the prosecutor. Jerry
reluctantly met the man's gaze.
"What do you say when the judge
asks you how you plead to the
charges?"

"Nolo contendere."

"Very good. It would be much
nicer if you'd consent to say 'guilty,'"
the prosecutor said.

"I don't like the word."

"Just remember. Three cameras
will be pointing at you. The trial will
be broadcast live. To America, you
represent all Americans. You must
comport yourself with dignity, quietly
accepting the fact that your
complicity in the assassination of
Peter Anderson—"

"Andreyevitch—"

"Anderson has brought you to the
point of death, where all depends on
the mercy of the court. And now I'll
go have lunch. Tonight we'll see
each other again. And remember,

No speeches. Nothing
embarrassing."

Jerry nodded. This was not the
time to argue.

He spent the afternoon practicing

PAINTING BY
GOTTFRIED HELNWEIN





conjugations of Portuguese irregular verbs, wishing that somehow he could go back and undo the moment when he agreed to speak to the old man who had unfolded all the plans to assassinate Andreyevitch. "Now I must trust you," said the old man. "Temos que confiar no senhor americano. You love liberty, né?"

Love liberty? Who knew anymore? What was liberty? Being free to make a buck? The Russians had been smart enough to know that if they let Americans make money, they really didn't give a damn which language the government was speaking. And, in fact, the government spoke English anyway.

The propaganda that they had been feeding him wasn't funny. It was too true. The United States had never been so peaceful. It was more prosperous than it had been since the Vietnam War boom 30 years before. And the lazy, complacent American people were going about business as usual, as if pictures of Lenin on buildings and billboards were just what they had always wanted.

I was no different, he reminded himself. I sent in my work application, complete with oath of allegiance. I accepted it meekly when they opted me out for a tutorial with a high Party official. I even taught his damnable little children for three years in Rio.

When I should have been writing plays. But what do I write about? Why not a comedy—*The Yankee and the Commissar*, a load of laughs about a woman commissar who marries an American blue blood who manufactures typewriters. There are no women commissars, of course, but one must maintain the illusion of a free and equal society.

"Bruce, my dear," says the commissar in a thick but sexy Russian accent, "your typewriter company is suspiciously close to making a profit."

"And if it were running at a loss, you'd turn me in, yes, my little noodle?" (Riotous laughs from the Russians in the audience; the Americans are not amused, but then, they speak English fluently and don't need broad humor. Besides, the reviews are all approved by the Party, so we don't have to worry about the critics. Keep the Russians happy, and screw the American audience.) Dialogue continues:

"All for the sake of Mother Russia."

"Screw Mother Russia."

"Please do," says Natasha. "Regard me as her personal incarnation."

Oh, but the Russians do love onstage sex. Forbidden in Russia, of course, but Americans are supposed to be decadent.

I might as well have been a ride designer for Disneyland, Jerry thought. Might as well have written shtick for vaudeville. Might as well go stick my head in an oven. But with my luck, it would be electric.

He may have slept. He wasn't sure. But the door opened, and he opened his eyes with no memory of having heard footsteps approach. The calm before the storm: and now, the storm.

The soldiers were young, but unSlavic. Slavish, but definitely American. Slaves to the Slavs. Put that in a protest poem sometime, he decided, if only there were someone who wanted to read a protest poem.

The young American soldiers (But the uniforms were wrong. I'm not old enough to remember the old ones, but these are not made for American bodies) escorted him down corridors, up stairs, through doors, until they were outside and they put him into a heavily armored van. What did they think, he was part of a conspiracy and his fellows would come to save him? Didn't they know that a man in his position would have no friends by now?

Jerry had seen it at Yale. Dr. Swick had been very popular. Best damn professor in the department. He could take the worst drivel and turn it into a play, take terrible actors and make them look good, take apathetic audiences and make them, of all things, enthusiastic and hopeful. And then one day the police had broken into his

**Gerald Nathan Crove,
the court finds you guilty of
murder and treason against the
United States . . . and
its ally, the Union of Soviet
Socialist Republics.
Do you have anything to say
before sentence . . . ?**

home and found Swick with four actors putting on a play for a group of maybe a score of friends. What was it—*Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*? Jerry remembered. A sad script. A despairing script. But a sharp one, nonetheless, one that showed despair as being an ugly, destructive thing, one that showed lies as suicide, one that, in short, made the audience feel that, by God, something was wrong with their lives, that the peace was illusion, that the prosperity was a fraud, that America's ambitions had been cut off and that so much that was good and proud was still undone—

And Jerry realized that he was weeping. The soldiers sitting across from him in the armored van were looking away. Jerry dried his eyes.

As soon as news got out that Swick was arrested, he was suddenly unknown. Everyone who had letters or memos or even class papers that bore his name destroyed them. His name disappeared from address books. His classes were empty as no one showed up. No one even hoping for a substitute, for the university suddenly had no record that there had ever been such a class, ever been such a professor. His

house had gone up for sale, his wife had moved, and no one said good-bye. And then, more than a year later, the CBS news (which always showed official trials then) had shown ten minutes of Swick weeping and saying, "Nothing has ever been better for America than Communism. It was just a foolish, immature desire to prove myself by thumbing my nose at authority. It meant nothing. I was wrong. The government's been kinder to me than I deserve." And so on. The words were silly. But as Jerry had sat, watching, he had been utterly convinced. However meaningless the words were, Swick's face was meaningful: he was utterly sincere.

The van stopped, and the doors in the back opened just as Jerry remembered that he had burned his copy of Swick's manual on playwriting. Burned it, but not until he had copied down all the major ideas. Whether Swick knew it or not, he had left something behind. But what will I leave behind? Jerry wondered. Two Russian children who now speak fluent English and whose father was blown up in their front yard right in front of them, his blood splattering their faces, because Jerry had neglected to warn him? What a legacy.

For a moment he was ashamed. A life is a life, no matter whose or how lived.

Then he remembered the night when Peter Andreyevitch (no—Anderson. Pretending to be American is fashionable nowadays, so long as everyone can tell at a glance that you're really Russian) had drunkenly sent for Jerry and demanded, as Jerry's employer (i.e., owner), that Jerry recite his poems to the guests at the party. Jerry had tried to laugh it off, but Peter was not that drunk; he insisted, and Jerry went upstairs and got his poems and came down and read them to a group of men who could not understand the poems, to a group of women who understood them and were merely amused. Little Andre said afterward, "The poems were good, Jerry," but Jerry felt like a virgin who had been raped and then given a two-dollar tip by the rapist.

In fact, Peter had given him a bonus. And Jerry had spent it.

Charlie Ridge, Jerry's defense attorney, met him just inside the doors of the courthouse. "Jerry, old boy, looks like you're taking all this pretty well. Haven't even lost any weight."

"On a diet of pure starch, I've had to run around my cell all day just to stay thin." Laughter. Ha ho, what a fun time we're having. What jovial people we are.

"Listen, Jerry, you've got to do this right, you know. They have audience response measurements. They can judge how sincere you seem. You've got to really mean it."

"Wasn't there once a time when defense attorneys tried to get their clients off?" Jerry asked.

"Jerry, that kind of attitude isn't going to get you anywhere. These aren't the good old days when you could get off on a tech-

nicality and a lawyer could delay trial for five years. You're guilty as hell, and so if you cooperate, they won't do anything to you. They'll just deport you."

"What a pal," Jerry said. "With you on my side, I haven't a worry in the world."

The courtroom was crowded with cameras. (Jerry had heard that in the old days of freedom of the press, cameras had often been barred from courtrooms. But then, in those days the defendant didn't usually testify and in those days the lawyers didn't both work from the same script. Still, there was the press, looking for all the world as if they thought they were free.)

Jerry had nothing to do for nearly half an hour. The audience (Are they paid? Jerry wondered. In America, they must be) filed in, and the show began at exactly eight o'clock. The judge came in looking impressive in his robes, and his voice was resonant and strong, like a father on television remonstrating his rebellious son. Everyone who spoke faced the camera with the red light on the top. And Jerry felt very tired.

He did not waver in his determination to try to turn this trial to his own advantage, but he seriously wondered what good it would do. And was it to his own advantage? They would certainly punish him more severely. Certainly they would be angry, would cut him off. But he had written his speech as if it were an impassioned climactic scene in a play (*Crove Against the Communists* or perhaps *Liberty's Last Cry*), and he the hero who would willingly give his life for the chance to instill a little bit of patriotism (a little bit of intelligence, who gives a damn about patriotism!) in the hearts and minds of the millions of Americans who would be watching.

"Gerald Nathan Crove, you have heard the charges against you. Please step forward and state your plea."

Jerry stood up and walked with, he hoped, dignity to the taped X on the floor where the prosecutor had insisted that he stand. He looked for the camera with the red light on. He stared into it intently, sincerely, and wondered if, after all, it wouldn't be better just to say *nolo contendere* or even *guilty* and have an easier time of it.

"Mr. Crove," intoned the judge, "America is watching. How do you plead?"

America was watching indeed. And Jerry opened his mouth and said not the Latin but the English he had rehearsed so often in his mind:

"There is a time for courage and a time for cowardice, a time when a man can give in to those who offer him leniency and a time when he must, instead, resist them for the sake of a higher goal. America was once a free nation. But as long as they pay our salaries, we seem content to be slaves! I plead not guilty, because any act that serves to weaken Russian domination of any nation in the world is a blow for all the things that make life worth living and against those to whom power is the only god worth worshipping!"

Ah. Eloquence. But in his rehearsals he had never dreamed he would get even this far, and yet they still showed no sign of stopping him. He looked away from the camera. He looked at the prosecutor, who was taking notes on a yellow pad. He looked at Charlie, and Charlie was resignedly shaking his head and putting his papers back in his briefcase. No one seemed to be particularly worried that Jerry was saying these things over live television. And the broadcasts were live—they had stressed that, that he must be careful to do everything correctly the first time because it was all live—

They were lying, of course. And Jerry stopped his speech and jammed his hands into his pockets, only to discover that the suit they had provided for him had no pockets (Save money by avoiding nonessentials, said the slogan), and his hands slid uselessly down his hips.

The prosecutor looked up in surprise when the judge cleared his throat. "Oh, I beg your pardon," he said. "The speeches usually go on much longer. I congratulate you, Mr. Crove, on your brevity."

Jerry nodded in mock acknowledgment, but he felt no mockery.

"We always have a dry run," said the prosecutor, "just to catch you last-chancers."

"Everyone knew that?"

"Well, everyone but you, of course, Mr. Crove. All right, everybody, you can go home now."

The audience arose and quietly shuffled out.

The prosecutor and Charlie got up and walked to the bench. The judge was resting his chin on his hands, looking not at all fatherly now, just a little bored. "How much do you want?" the judge asked.

"Unlimited," said the prosecutor.

"Is he really that important?" Jerry might as well have not been there. "After all, they're doing the actual bombings in Brazil."

"Mr. Crove is an American," said the prosecutor, "who chose to let a Russian ambassador be assassinated."

"All right, all right," said the judge, and Jerry marveled that the man hadn't the slightest trace of a Russian accent.

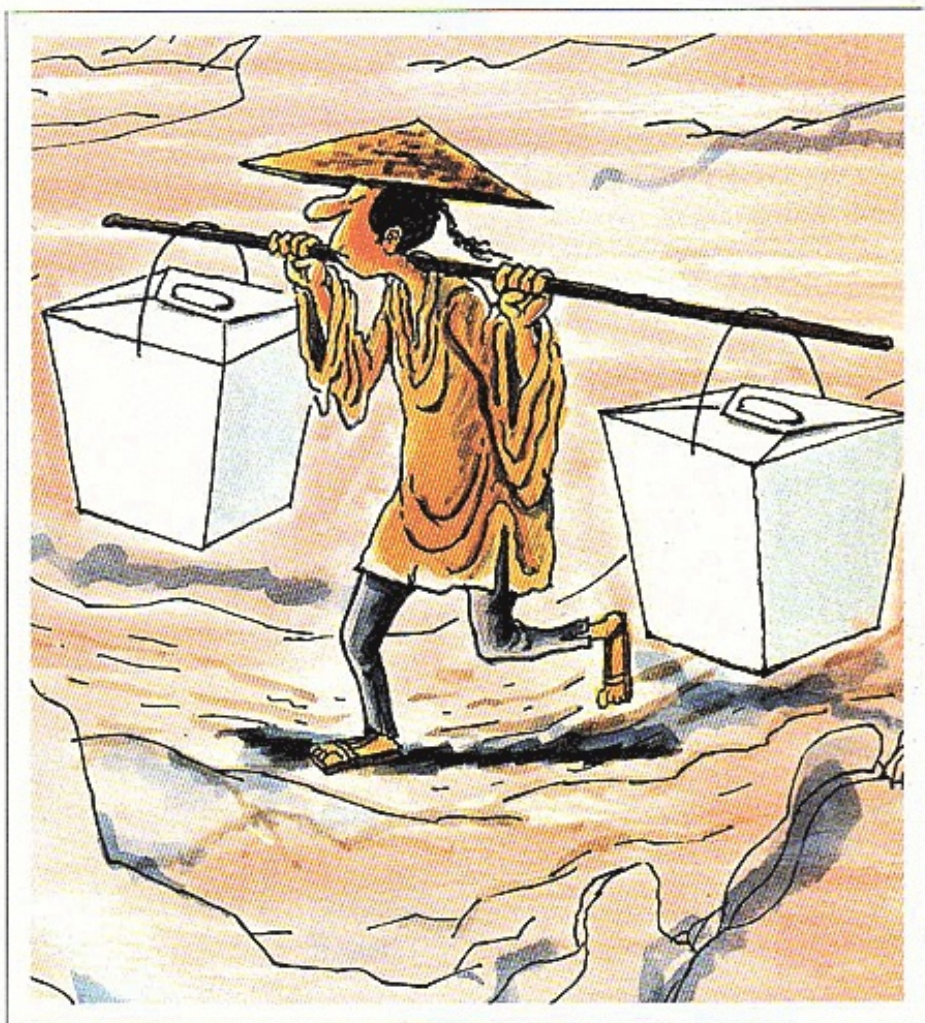
"Gerald Nathan Crove, the court finds you guilty of murder and treason against the United States of America and its ally, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Do you have anything to say before sentence is pronounced?"

"I just wondered," said Jerry, "why you all speak English."

"Because," said the prosecutor icily, "we are in America."

"Why do you even bother with trials?"

"To stop other imbeciles from trying what you did. He just wants to argue."



The judge slammed down his gavel. "The court sentences Gerald Nathan Crove to be put to death by every available method until such time as he convincingly apologizes for his action to the American people. Court stands adjourned. Lord in heaven, do I have a headache."

They wasted no time. At five o'clock in the morning, Jerry had barely fallen asleep. Perhaps they monitored this, because they promptly woke him up with a brutal electric shock across the metal floor where Jerry was lying. Two guards—this time Russians—came in and stripped him and then dragged him to the execution chamber even though, had they let him, he would have walked.

The prosecutor was waiting. "I have been assigned your case," he said, "because you promise to be a challenge. Your psychological profile is interesting, Mr. Crove. You long to be a hero."

"I wasn't aware of that."

"You displayed it in the courtroom, Mr. Crove. You are no doubt aware—your middle name implies it—of the last words of the American Revolutionary War espionage agent named Nathan Hale. 'I regret that I have but one life to give for my country,' he said. You shall discover that he was mistaken. He should be very glad he had but one life."

"Since you were arrested several weeks ago in Rio de Janeiro, we have been growing a series of clones for you. Development is quite accelerated, but they have been kept in zero-sensation environments until the present. Their minds are blank."

"You are surely aware of some, yes, Mr. Crove?"

Jerry nodded. The starship sleep drug. "We don't need it in this case, of course. But the mind-taping technique we use on interstellar flights—that is quite useful. When we execute you, Mr. Crove, we shall be continuously taping your brain. All your memories will be rather indecorously dumped into the head of the first clone, who will immediately become you. However, he will clearly remember all your life up to and including the moment of death."

"It was so easy to be a hero in the old days, Mr. Crove. Then you never knew for sure what death was like. It was compared to sleep, to great emotional pain, to quick departure of the soul from the body. None of these, of course, is particularly accurate."

Jerry was frightened. He had heard of multiple death before, of course—it was rumored to exist because of its deterrent value. "They resurrect you and kill you again and again," said the horror story, and now he knew that it was true. Or they wanted him to believe it was true.

What frightened Jerry was the way they planned to kill him. A noose hung from a hook in the ceiling. It could be raised and lowered, but there didn't seem to be the slightest provision for a quick, sharp drop to break his neck. Jerry had once almost

choked to death on a salmon bone. The sensation of not being able to breathe terrified him.

"How can I get out of this?" Jerry asked, his palms sweating.

"The first one, not at all," said the prosecutor. "So you might as well be brave and use up your heroism this time around. Afterward we'll give you a screen test and see how convincing your repentance is. We're fair, you know. We try to avoid putting anyone through this unnecessarily. Please sit."

Jerry sat. A man in a lab coat put a metal helmet on his head. A few needles pricked into Jerry's scalp.

"Already," said the prosecutor, "your first clone is becoming aware. He already has all your memories. He is right now living through your panic—or shall we say your attempts at courage. Make sure you concentrate carefully on what is about to happen to you, Jerry. You want to make sure you remember every detail."

"Please," Jerry said.

• The soldiers were young, but unSlavic. Slavish, but definitely American. Slaves to Slavs. Put that in a protest poem sometime, he decided, if only there were someone who wanted to read a protest poem. •

"Buck up, my man," said the prosecutor with a grin. "You were wonderful in the courtroom. Let's have some of that noble resistance now."

Then the guards led him to the noose and put it around his neck, being careful not to dislodge the helmet. They pulled it tight and then tied his hands behind his back. The rope was rough on his neck. He waited, his neck tingling, for the sensation of being lifted in the air. He flexed his neck muscles, trying to keep them rigid, though he knew the effort would be useless. His knees grew weak, waiting for them to raise the rope.

The room was plain. There was nothing to see, and the prosecutor had left the room. There was, however, a mirror on a wall beside him. He could barely see into it without turning his entire body. He was sure it was an observation window. They would watch, of course.

Jerry needed to go to the bathroom.

Remember, he told himself, I won't really die. I'll be awake in the other room in just a moment.

But his body was not convinced. It didn't matter a bit that a new Jerry Crove would be

ready to get up and walk away when this was over. This Jerry Crove would die.

"What are you waiting for?" he demanded, and as if that had been their cue the guards pulled the rope and lifted him into the air.

From the beginning it was worse than he had thought. The rope had an agonizingly tight grip on his neck; there was no question of resisting at all. The suffocation was nothing, at first. Like being under water holding your breath. But the rope itself was painful, and his neck hurt, and he wanted to cry out with the pain; but nothing could escape his throat.

Not at first.

There was some fumbling with the rope, and it jumped up and down as the guards tied it to the hook on the wall. Once Jerry's feet even touched the floor.

By the time the rope held still, however, the effects of the strangling were taking over and the pain was forgotten. The blood was pounding inside Jerry's head. His tongue felt thick. He could not shut his eyes. And now he wanted to breathe. He had to breathe. His body demanded a breath.

His body was not under control. Intellectually, he knew that he could not possibly reach the floor, knew that this death would be temporary, but right now his mind was not having much influence over his body. His legs kicked and struggled to reach the ground. His hands strained at the rope behind him. And all the exertion only made his eyes bulge more with the pressure of the blood that could not get past the rope; only made him need air more desperately.

There was no help for him, but now he tried to scream for help. The sound now escaped his throat—but at the cost of air. He felt as if his tongue were being pushed up into his nose. His kicking grew more violent, though every kick was agony. He spun on the rope; he caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror. His face was turning purple.

How long will it be? Surely not much longer!

But it was much longer.

If he had been underwater, holding his breath, he would now have given up and drowned.

If he had a gun and a free hand, he would kill himself now to end this agony and the sheer physical terror of being unable to breathe. But he had no gun, and there was no question of inhaling, and the blood throbbed in his head and made his eyes see everything in shades of red, and finally he saw nothing at all.

Saw nothing, except what was going through his mind, and that was a jumble, as if his consciousness were madly trying to make some arrangement that would eliminate the strangulation. He kept seeing himself in the creek behind his house, where he had fallen in when he was a child, and someone was throwing him a rope, but he couldn't and he couldn't and he couldn't catch it, and then suddenly it was around

his neck and dragging him under.

Spots of black stabbed at his eyes. His body felt bloated, and then it erupted, his bowel and bladder and stomach ejecting all that they contained, except that his vomit was stopped at his throat, where it burned.

The shaking of his body turned into convulsive jerks and spasms, and for a moment Jerry felt himself reaching the welcome state of unconsciousness. Then, suddenly, he discovered that death is not so kind.

There is no such thing as slipping off quietly in your sleep. No such thing as being "killed immediately" or having death mercifully end the pain.

Death woke him from his unconsciousness, for perhaps a tenth of a second. But that tenth of a second was infinite, and in it he experienced the infinite agony of impending nonexistence. His life did not flash before his eyes. The lack of life instead exploded, and in his mind he experienced far greater pain and fear than anything he had felt from the mere hanging.

And then he died.

For an instant he hung in limbo, feeling and seeing nothing. Then a light stabbed at his eyes and soft foam peeled away from his skin and the prosecutor stood there, watching as he gasped and retched and clutched at his throat. It seemed incredible that he could now breathe, and if he had experienced only the strangling, he might now sigh with relief and say, "I've been through it once, and now I'm not afraid of death." But the strangling was nothing. The strangling was prelude. And he was afraid of death.

They forced him to come into the room where he had died. He saw his body hanging, black-faced, from the ceiling, the helmet still on the head, the tongue protruding.

"Cut it down," the prosecutor said, and for a moment Jerry waited for the guards to obey. Instead, a guard handed Jerry a knife.

With death still heavy in his mind, Jerry swung around and lunged at the prosecutor. But a guard caught his hand in an irresistible grip, and the other guard held a pistol pointed at Jerry's head.

"Do you want to die again so soon?" asked the prosecutor, and Jerry whimpered and took the knife and reached up to cut himself down from the noose. In order to reach above the knot, he had to stand close enough to the corpse to touch it. The stench was incredible. And the fact of death was unavoidable. Jerry trembled so badly he could hardly control the knife, but eventually the rope parted and the corpse slumped to the ground, knocking Jerry down as it fell. An arm lay across Jerry's legs. The face looked at Jerry eye-to-eye.

"You see the camera?"

Jerry nodded, numbly.

"You will look at the camera and you will apologize for having done anything against the government that has brought peace to

the earth."

Jerry nodded again, and the prosecutor said, "Roll it."

"Fellow Americans," Jerry said, "I'm sorry. I made a terrible mistake. I was wrong. There's nothing wrong with the Russians. I let an innocent man be killed. Forgive me. The government has been kinder to me than I deserve." And so on. For an hour Jerry babbled, insisting that he was craven, that he was guilty, that he was worthless, that the government was vying with God for respectability.

And when he was through, the prosecutor came back in, shaking his head.

"Mr. Crove, you can do better than that."

"Nobody in the audience believed you for one minute. Nobody in the test sample, not one person, believed that you were the least bit sincere. You still think the government ought to be deposed. And so we have to try the treatment again."

"Let me try to confess again."

"A screen test is a screen test, Mr. Crove. We have to give you a little more experience with death before we can permit you to have any involvement with life."

This time Jerry screamed right from the beginning. He made no attempt at all to bear it well. They hung him by the armpits over a long cylinder filled with boiling oil. They slowly lowered him. Death came when the oil was up to his chest—by then

his legs had been completely cooked and the meat was falling off the bones in large chunks.

They made him come in and, when the oil had cooled enough to touch, fish out the pieces of his own corpse.

He wept all through his confession this time, but the test audience was completely unconvinced. "The man's a phony," they said. "He doesn't believe a word of what he's saying."

"We have a problem," said the prosecutor. "You seem so willing to cooperate after your death. But you have reservations. You aren't speaking from the heart. We'll have to help you again."

Jerry screamed and struck out at the prosecutor. When the guards had pulled him away (and the prosecutor was nursing an injured nose), Jerry shouted, "Of course I'm lying! No matter how often you kill me it won't change the fact that this is a government of fools by vicious, lying bastards!"

"On the contrary," said the prosecutor, trying to maintain his good manners and cheerful demeanor despite the blood pouring out of his nose, "if we kill you enough, you'll completely change your mind."

"You can't change the truth!"

"We've changed it for everyone else who's gone through this. And you are far from being the first who had to go to a third



clone. But this time, Mr. Crove, do try to forget about being a hero."

They skinned him alive, arms and legs first, and then, finally, they castrated him and ripped the skin off his belly and chest. He died silently when they cut his larynx out—no, not silently. Just voiceless. He found that without a voice he could still whisper a scream that rang in his ears when he awoke and was forced to go in and carry his bloody corpse to the disposal room. He confessed again, and the audience was not convinced.

They slowly crushed him to death, and he had to scrub the blood out of the crusher when he awoke, but the audience only commented, "Who does the jerk think he's fooling?"

They disemboweled him and burned his guts in front of him. They infected him with rabies and let his death linger for two weeks. They crucified him and let exposure and thirst kill him. They dropped him a dozen times from the roof of a one-story building until he died.

Yet the audience knew that Jerry Crove had not repented.

"My God, Crove, how long do you think I can keep doing this?" asked the prosecutor. He did not seem cheerful. In fact, Jerry thought he looked almost desperate.

"Getting a little tough on you?" Jerry asked, grateful for the conversation because it meant there would be a few minutes between deaths.

"What kind of man do you think I am? We'll bring him back to life in a minute anyway, I tell myself, but I didn't get into this business in order to find new, hideous ways of killing people."

"You don't like it? And yet you have such a natural talent for it."

The prosecutor looked sharply at Crove. "Irony? Now you can joke? Doesn't death mean anything to you?"

Jerry did not answer, only tried to blink back the tears that these days came unbidden every few minutes.

"Crove, this is not cheap. Do you think it's cheap? We've spent literally billions of rubles on you. And even with inflation, that's a hell of a lot of money."

"In a classless society there's no need for money."

"What is this, dammit! Now you're getting rebellious? Now you're trying to be a hero?"

"No."

"No wonder we've had to kill you eight times! You keep thinking up clever arguments against us!"

"I'm sorry. Heaven knows I'm sorry."

"I've asked to be released from this assignment. I obviously can't crack you."

"Crack me! As if I didn't long to be cracked."

"You're costing too much. There's a definite benefit in having criminals convincingly recant on television. But you're getting too expensive. The cost-benefit ratio is ridiculous now. There's a limit to how much we can spend on you."

"I have a way for you to save money."

"So do I. Convince the damned audience!"

"Next time you kill me, don't put a helmet on my head."

The prosecutor looked absolutely shocked. "That would be final. That would be capital punishment. We're a humane government. We never kill anybody permanently."

They shot him in the gut and let him bleed to death. They threw him from a cliff into the sea. They let a shark eat him alive. They hung him upside down so that just his head was under water, and when he finally got too tired to hold his head out of the water he drowned.

But through all this, Jerry had become more inured to the pain. His mind had finally learned that none of these deaths was permanent after all. And now when the moment of death came, though it was still terrible, he endured it better. He screamed less. He approached death with greater calm. He even hastened the process, deliberately inhaling great draughts of water, deliberately wriggling to attract the shark. When they had the guards kick him to death he kept yelling, "Harder," until he couldn't yell anymore.

And finally when they set up a screen test, he fervently told the audience that the Russian government was the most terrifying empire the world had ever known, because this time they were efficient at keeping their power, because this time there was no outside for barbarians to come from, and because they had seduced the freest people in history into loving slavery. His speech was from the heart—he loathed the Russians and loved the memory that once there had been freedom and law and a measure of justice in America.

And the prosecutor came into the room ashen-faced.

"You bastard," he said.

"Oh. You mean the audience was live this time?"

"A hundred loyal citizens. And you corrupted all but three of them."

"Corrupted?"

"Convinced them."

Silence for a moment, and then the prosecutor sat down and buried his head in his hands.

"Going to lose your job?" Jerry asked.

"Of course."

"I'm sorry. You're good at it."

The prosecutor looked at him with loathing. "No one ever failed at this before. And I had never had to take anyone beyond a second death. You've died a dozen times, Crove, and you've got used to it."

"I didn't mean to."

"How did you do it?"

"I don't know."

"What kind of animal are you, Crove? Can't you make up a lie and believe it?"

Crove chuckled. (In the old days, at this level of amusement he would have laughed uproariously. But inured to death or not, he had scars. And he would never laugh

loudly again.) "It was my business. As a playwright. The willing suspension of disbelief."

The door opened and a very important-looking man in a military uniform covered with medals came in, followed by four Russian soldiers. The prosecutor sighed and stood up. "Good-bye, Crove."

"Good-bye," Jerry said.

"You're a very strong man."

"So," said Jerry, "are you." And the prosecutor left.

The soldiers took Jerry out of the prison to a different place entirely. A large complex of buildings in Florida. Cape Canaveral. They were exiling him, Jerry realized.

"What's it like?" he asked the technician who was preparing him for the flight.

"Who knows?" the technician asked. "No one's ever come back. Hell, no one's ever arrived yet."

"After I sleep on somec, will I have any trouble waking up?"

"In the labs, here on earth, no. Out there, who knows?"

"But you think we'll live?"

"We send you to planets that look like they might be habitable. If they aren't, so sorry. You take your chances. The worst that can happen is you die."

"Is that all?" Jerry murmured.

"Now lie down and let me tape your brain."

Jerry lay down and the helmet, once again, recorded his thoughts. It was irresistible, of course: when you are conscious that your thoughts are being taped, Jerry realized, it is impossible not to try to think something important. As if you were performing. Only the audience would consist of just one person. Yourself when you woke up.

But he thought this: That this starship and the others that would be and had been sent out to colonize in prison worlds were not really what the Russians thought they were. True, the prisoners sent in the Gulag ships would be away from earth for centuries before they landed, and many or most of them would not survive. But some would survive.

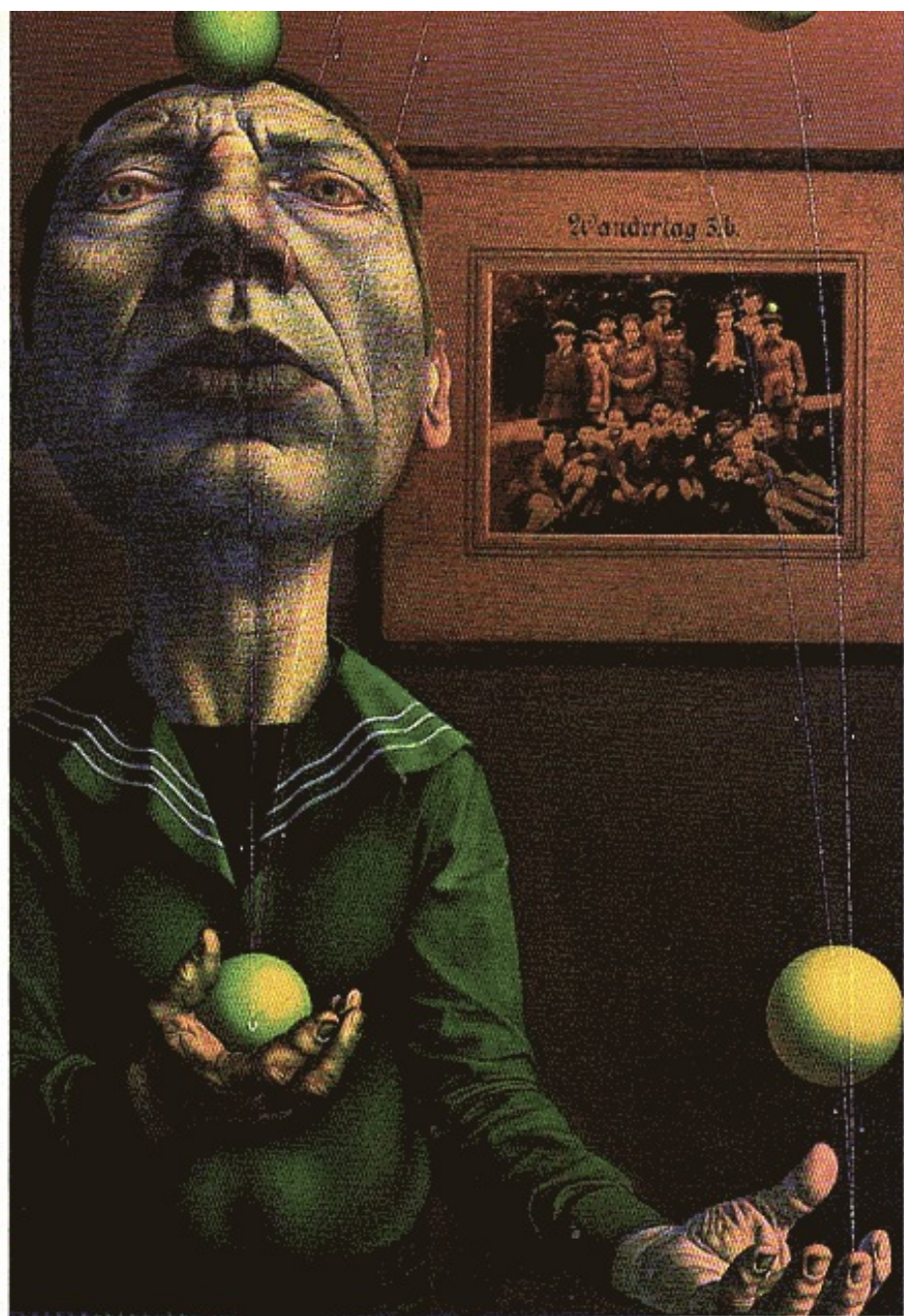
I will survive, Jerry thought as the helmet picked up his brain pattern and transferred it to tape.

Out there the Russians are creating their own barbarians. I will be Attila the Hun. My child will be Mohammed. My grandchild will be Genghis Khan.

One of us, someday, will sack Rome.

Then the somec was injected, and it swept through him, taking consciousness with it, and Jerry realized with a shock of recognition that this, too, was death: but a welcome death, and he didn't mind. Because this time when he woke up he would be free.

He hummed cheerfully until he couldn't remember how to hum, and then they put his body with hundreds of others on a starship and pushed them all out into space, where they fell upward endlessly into the stars. Going home. **DD**



WAITING FOR THE EARTHQUAKE

*Morrissey could flee back to Earth like the other
humans . . . but
he'd stay to be destroyed in the quake*

BY ROBERT SILVERBERG

It was eleven weeks and two days and three hours—plus or minus a little—until the earthquake that was going to devastate the planet, and suddenly Morrissey found himself doubting that the earthquake was going to happen at all. The strange notion stopped him in his tracks. He was out strolling the shore of the Ring Ocean, half a dozen kilometers from his cabin, when the

idea came to him. He turned to his companion, an old fux called Dinoov, who was just entering his postsexual phase, and said in a peculiar tone, "What if the ground doesn't shake?"

"But it will," the aborigine said calmly.

"What if the predictions are wrong?"

The fux was a small, elegant, blue-furred creature, sleek and compact, with the cool,

PAINTING BY RUDOLF HAUSNER

all-accepting demeanor that comes from having passed safely through all the storms and metamorphoses of a fux's reproductive odyssey. It raised itself on its hind legs, the only pair that remained to it now, and said, "You should cover your head when you walk in the sunlight at flare time, friend Morrissey. The brightness damages the soul."

"You think I'm crazy, Dinoov?"

"I think you are under great stress."

Morrissey nodded vaguely. He looked away and stared westward across the shining, blood-hued ocean, narrowing his eyes as if trying to see the frosty, crystalline shores of Farside beyond the curve of the horizon. Perhaps half a kilometer out to sea he detected glistening patches of bright green on the surface of the water: the spawning bloom of the balloons. High above those dazzling streaks, a dozen or so brilliant, iridescent gasbag creatures hovered, going through the early sarabands of their mating dance. The quake would not matter at all to the balloons. When the surface of Medea heaved and buckled and crumpled, they would be drifting far overhead, dreaming their transcendental dreams and paying no attention.

But maybe there will be no quake, Morrissey told himself.

He played with the thought. He had waited all his life for the vast apocalyptic event that was supposed to put an end to the thousand-year-long human occupation

of Medea, and now, very close to earthquake time, he found a savage, perverse pleasure in denying the truth of what he knew to be coming. *No earthquake! No earthquake! Life will go on, and on, and on!* The thought gave him a chilling, prickling feeling. There was an odd sensation in the soles of his feet, as if he were standing with both his feet off the ground.

Morrissey imagined himself sending out a joyful message to all those who had fled the doomed world: *Come back, all is well, it didn't happen! Come live on Medea again!* And he saw the fleet of great gleaming ships swinging around, heading back, moving like mighty dolphins across the void, shimmering like needles in the purple sky, dropping down by the hundreds to unload the vanished settlers at Chong and Enrique and Pellucidar and Port Medea and Madagozar. Swarms of people rushing forth, tears, hugs, raucous laughter, old friends reunited, the cities coming alive again! Morrissey trembled. He closed his eyes and wrapped his arms tight around himself. The fantasy had almost hallucinatory power. It made him giddy, and his skin, bleached and leathery from a lifetime under the ultraviolet flares of the twin suns, grew hot and moist. *Come home, come home! The earthquake's been canceled!*

He savored the fantasy. And then he let go of it and allowed its bright glow to fade.

He said to the fux, "There are eleven weeks left. And then everything on Medea

is going to be destroyed. Why are you so calm, Dinoov?"

"Why not?"

"Don't you care?"

"Do you?"

"I love this place," Morrissey said. "I can't bear to see it all smashed apart."

"Then why didn't you go home to Earth with the others?"

"Home? This is my home. I have Medean genes in my body. My people have lived here for a thousand years. My great-grandparents were born on Medea, and so were their great-grandparents."

"The others could say the same thing. Yet when earthquake time drew near, they went home. Why have you stayed?"

Morrissey, towering over the slender little being, was silent a moment. Then he laughed harshly and said, "I didn't evacuate for the same reason that you don't give a damn that a killer quake is coming. We're both done for anyway, right? I don't know anything about Earth. It's not my world. I'm too old to start over there. And you? You're on your last legs, aren't you? Both your wombs are gone; your male itch is gone; you're in that nice, quiet, burned-out phase, eh, Dinoov?" Morrissey chuckled. "We deserve each other. Waiting for the end together, two old hulks."

The fux studied Morrissey with glinting, unfathomable, mischievous eyes. Then he pointed downwind toward a headland maybe three hundred meters away, a sandy rise thickly furred with bladdermoss and scrubby, yellow-leaved anglepod bushes. Right at the tip of the cape, outlined sharply against the glowing sky, were a couple of fuxes. One was female, six-legged, yet to bear her first litter. Behind her, gripping her haunches and readying himself to mount, was a bipedal male, and even at this distance Morrissey could see his frantic, almost desperate movements.

"What are they doing?" Dinoov asked.

Morrissey shrugged. "Mating."

"Yes. And when will she drop her young?"

"In fifteen weeks."

"Are they burned out?" the fux asked.

"Are they done for? Why do they make young if destruction is coming?"

"Because they can't help—"

Dinoov silenced Morrissey with an up-raised hand. "I meant the question not to be answered. Not yet, not until you understand things better. Yes? Please?"

"I don't—"

"Understand. Exactly." The fux smiled a fuxy smile. "This walk has tired you. Come now. I'll go with you to your cabin."

They scrambled briskly up the path from the long crescent of pale blue sand that was the beach to the top of the bluff and then walked more slowly down the road, past the abandoned holiday cabins, toward Morrissey's place. Once this had been Argoview Dunes, a bustling shore-side community, but it was long ago. Morrissey in these latter days would have pre-



ferred to live in some wilder terrain where the hand of man had not weighed so heavily on the natural landscape, but he dared not risk it. Medea, even after ten centuries of colonization, was still a world of sudden perils. The unconquered places had gone unconquered for good reason. Living on alone since the evacuation, he needed to keep close to some settlement, with its stores of food and materiel. He could not afford the picturesque.

In any case the wilderness was rapidly reclaiming its own now that most of the intruders had departed. In the early days this steamy low-latitude tropical coast had been infested with all manner of monstrous beasts. Some had been driven off by methodical campaigns of extermination, and others, repelled by the effluvia of the human settlements, had simply disappeared. But they were beginning to return. A few weeks ago Morrissey had seen a scuttlefish come ashore, a gigantic black-scaled tubular thing, hauling itself onto land by desperate heaves of its awesome curved flippers and actually digging its fangs into the sand, biting the shore to pull itself onward. They were supposed to be extinct. By a fantastic effort the thing had dug itself into the beach, burying all twenty meters of its body in the azure sand, and a couple of hours later hundreds of young ones that had tunneled out of the mighty carcass began to emerge, slender beasts no longer than Morrissey's arm that went writhing with demonic energy down the dunes and into the rough surf. So this was becoming a sea of monsters again. Morrissey had no objections. Swimming was no longer one of his recreations.

He had lived by himself beside the Ring Ocean for two years in a little, low-roofed cabin of the old Arcan wing-structure design that so beautifully resisted the diabolical Medean winds. In the days of his marriage, when he had been a geophysicist mapping the fault lines, he and Nadia and Paul and Danielle had had a house on the outskirts of Chong, on Northcape, within view of the High Cascades, and had come here only in winter. But Nadia had gone to sing cosmic harmonies with the serene and noble and incomprehensible balloons, and Danielle had been caught in the Hotlands at double-flare time and had not returned, and Paul—tough, old, indestructible Paul—had panicked over the thought that the earthquake was only a decade away, and between Darkday and Dimday of Christmas week he packed up and boarded an Earthbound ship. All that had happened within the space of four months, and afterward Morrissey found he had lost his fondness for the chilly air of Northcape. So he had come down to Argoview Dunes to wait out the final years in the comfort of the humid tropics, and now he was the only one left in the shoreside community. He had brought persona cubes of Paul and Nadia and Danielle with him, but playing them turned out to be too painful, and it was a long time since he had

talked with anyone but Dinoov. For all he knew, he was the only one left on Medea. Except, of course, the fuxes and the balloons. And the scuttlefish and the rock demons and the wingfingers and the not-turtles and all of those.

Morrissey and Dinoov stood silently for a time outside the cabin, watching the sunset begin. Through a darkening sky, mottled with the green and yellow folds and streaks of Medea's perpetual aurora, the twin suns Phrixus and Helle—mere orange-red daubs of feeble light—drifted toward the horizon. In a few hours they would be gone, off to cast their bleak glow over the dry-ice wastelands of Farside. There could never be real darkness on the inhabited side of Medea, though, for the oppressive, sullen bulk of Argo, the huge red-hot-gas giant planet whose moon Medea was, lay just a million kilometers away. Medea, locked in Argo's grip, kept the same face turned toward her enormous primary all the time. From Argo came the warmth that made life

*“Don't play those games
with me.
Your people have ways
of circulating
information that we
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just beginning to suspect.
You know.”*

possible on Medea, and also a perpetual, dull reddish illumination.

The stars were beginning to appear as the twin suns set.

“See there,” Dinoov said. “Argo has nearly eaten the white fires.”

The fux had chosen deliberately archaic terms, folk astronomy, but Morrissey understood what he meant. Phrixus and Helle were not the only suns in Medea's sky. The two orange-red dwarf stars, moving as a binary unit, were themselves subject to a pair of magnificent blue-white stars, Castor A and Castor B. Though the blue-white stars were a thousand times as far from Medea as the orange-red ones were, they were plainly visible by day and by night, casting a brilliant icy glare. But now they were moving into eclipse behind great Argo, and soon—eleven weeks, two days, one hour, plus or minus a little—they would disappear entirely.

And how then could there not be an earthquake?

Morrissey was angry with himself for the pathetic softheadedness of his fantasy of an hour ago. No earthquake? A last-minute miracle? The calculations in error? Sure.

Sure. If wishes were horses, beggars might ride. The earthquake was inevitable. A day would come when the configuration of the heavens was exactly *thus*. Phrixus and Helle positioned *here*, and Castor A and B *there*, and Medea's neighboring moons Jason and Theseus and Orpheus *there* and *there* and *there*, and Argo as ever exerting its inexorable pull above the Hotlands, and when the celestial vectors were properly aligned, the gravitational stresses would send a terrible shudder through the crust of Medea.

This happened every seventy-one hundred sixty years. And the time was at hand.

Centuries ago, when the persistence of certain apocalyptic themes in fux folklore had finally led the astronomers of the Medea colony to run a few belated calculations of these matters, no one had really cared. Hearing that the world will come to an end in five or six hundred years is much like hearing that you yourself are going to die in another fifty or sixty: It makes no practical difference in the conduct of everyday life. Later, of course, as the seismic tickdown moved along, people began to think about it more seriously, and beyond doubt it had been a depressive factor in the Medean economy for the past century or so. Nevertheless, Morrissey's generation was the first that had confronted the dimensions of the impending calamity in any realistic way. And in one manner or another the thousand-year-old colony had melted away in little more than a decade.

“How quiet everything is!” Morrissey said. He glanced at the fux. “Do you think I'm the only one left, Dinoov?”

“How would I know?”

“Don't play those games with me. Your people have ways of circulating information that we were only just beginning to suspect. You know.”

The fux said gravely, “The world is large. There were many human cities. Probably some others of your kind are still living here, but I have no certain knowledge. You may well be the last one.”

“I suppose. Someone had to be.”

“Does it give you satisfaction, knowing you are last?”

“Because it means I have more endurance, or because I think it's good that the colony has broken up?”

“Either,” said the fux.

“I don't feel a thing,” Morrissey said. “Either way. I'm the last, if I'm the last, because I didn't want to leave. That's all. This is my home, and here I stay. I don't feel proud or brave or noble for having stayed. I wish there weren't going to be an earthquake, but I can't do anything about that, and by now I think I don't even care.”

“Really?” Dinoov asked. “That's not how it seemed a little while ago.”

Morrissey smiled. “Nothing lasts. We pretend we build for the ages, but time moves and everything fades and art becomes artifacts and sand becomes sandstone, and what of it? Once there was a world here and

we turned it into a colony. And now the colonists are gone, and soon the colony will be gone, and this will be a world again, as our rubble blows away. And what of it?"

"You sound very old," Dinoov interjected.

"I am very old. Older even than you."

"Only in years. Our lives move faster than yours do, but in my few years I have been through all the stages of my life, and the end would soon be coming for me even if the ground were not going to shake. But you still have time left."

Morrissey shrugged.

The fux said, "I know that there are starships standing fueled and ready at Port Medea, ready to go."

"Are you sure? Ships ready to go?"

"Many of them. They were not needed. The Ahya have seen them and told us."

"The balloons? What were they doing at Port Medea?"

"Who understands the Ahya? They wander where they please. But they have seen the ships, friend Morrissey. You could still save yourself."

"Sure," Morrissey said. "I take a flitter thousands of kilometers across Medea, and I singlehandedly give a starship the checkdown for a voyage of fifty light-years, and then I put myself into coldsleep and go home all alone and wake up on an alien planet where my remote ancestors happened to have been born. What for?"

"You will die, I think, when the ground shakes."

"I will die, I think, even if it doesn't."

"Sooner or later. But this way, later."

"If I had wanted to leave Medea," Morrissey said, "I would have gone with the others. It's too late now."

"No," said the fux. "There are ships at Port Medea. Go to Port Medea, my friend."

Morrissey was silent. In the dimming light he knelt and tugged at tough little hummocks of stickweed that were beginning to invade his garden. Once he had landscaped this place with exotic shrubs gathered from all over Medea, everything beautiful that was capable of surviving the humidity and the rainfall of the Wetlands, but now, as the end drew near, the native plants of the coast were closing in, smothering his whiptrees and dangle-twines and flametrees and the rest, and he no longer was able to check their growth. For some minutes he clawed at the sticky stoloniferous killers, baleful orange against the tawny sand, that suddenly were sprouting near his doorway.

Then he said, "I think I will take a trip, Dinoov."

The fux looked startled. "You'll go to Port Medea?"

"There, yes, and other places. It's years since I've left the Dunes. I'm going to make a farewell tour of the whole planet."

Morrissey spent the next day, Darkday, quietly—planning his trip, packing, reading, wandering along the beachfront in the twilight's red glimmer. There was no sign all day of Dinoov, or indeed of any of the local fuxes, although in midafternoon a hundred

or more balloons drifted past in tight formation, heading out to sea. In the darkness their shimmering colors were muted, but still they were a noble sight: huge, taut globes trailing long, coiling, ropy organs.

Toward evening he drew from his locker a dinner that he had been saving for some special occasion, Madagozar oysters and filet of vandaleur and newly ripened peeperpods. There were two bottles of golden-red Palinurus wine left; he opened one of them. He drank and ate until he started to nod off at the table; then he lurched to his cradle, programmed himself for ten hours sleep, about twice what he normally needed at his age, and closed his eyes.

When he woke, it was well along into Dimday morning, with the double sun not yet visible but already throwing pink light across the crest of the eastern hills. Morrissey, skipping breakfast altogether, went into town and ransacked the commissary. He filled a freezercase with provisions

*•The cubes were
clever things. You could record
yourself in an
hour or so: facial gestures,
motion habits, voice,
speech patterns. Scanners
identified
certain broad patterns of
mental response. •*

enough to last him for three months, since he had no idea what to expect by way of supplies elsewhere on Medea. At the landing strip where commuters from Enrique and Pellucidar once had parked their flitters after flying in for the weekend, he checked out his own, an '83 model with sharply raked lines and a sophisticated moire-pattern skin, now somewhat pitted and rusted from neglect. The powerpak still indicated a full charge—ninety-year half-life; he wasn't surprised—but just to be on the safe side, he borrowed an auxiliary pak from an adjoining flitter and keyed it in as a reserve. He hadn't flown in years, but that didn't worry him much: The flitter responded to voice-actuated commands, and Morrissey doubted that he'd have to do any manual overriding.

Everything was ready by midafternoon. He slipped into the pilot's seat and told the flitter, "Give me a systems checkout for extended flight."

Lights went on and off on the control panels. It was an impressive display of technological choreography, although Morrissey had forgotten what the displays signified. He called for verbal confirmation,

and the flitter told him in a no-nonsense contralto that it was ready for takeoff.

"Your course," Morrissey said, "is due west for fifty kilometers at an altitude of five hundred meters, then north-northeast as far as Jane's Town, east to Hawkman Farms, and southwest back to Argoview Dunes. Then, without landing, head due north by the shortest route to Port Kato. Got it?"

Morrissey waited for takeoff. Nothing happened.

"Well?" he queried.

"Awaiting tower clearance," the flitter responded.

"Consider all clearance programs revoked."

Still nothing happened. Morrissey wondered how to key in a program override. But the flitter evidently could find no reason to call Morrissey's bluff, and after a moment takeoff lights glowed all over the cabin, and a low humming came from aft. Smoothly the little vehicle retracted its windjacks, gliding into flight position, and spun upward into the moist, heavy, turbulent air.

Morrissey had chosen to begin his journey with a ceremonial circumnavigation of the immediate area, ostensibly to be sure that his flitter could still fly after all these years, but he suspected also that he wanted to show himself aloft to the fuxes of the district, to let them know that at least one human vehicle still traversed the skies. The flitter seemed all right. Within minutes he was at the beach, flying directly over his own cabin—it was the only one whose garden had not been overrun by jungle scrub—and then out over the dark, tide-driven ocean. Up north then to the big port of Jane's Town, where tourist cruisers lay rusting in the crescent harbor, and inland a little way to a derelict farming settlement, where the tops of mighty gattabangus trees, heavily laden with succulent scarlet fruit, were barely visible above swarming strangervines. And then back, over sandy, scrubby hills, to the Dunes. Everything below was desolate and dismal. He saw a good many fuxes, long columns of them in some places, mainly six-legged females and some four-legged ones, with males leading the way. Oddly, they all seemed to be marching inland, toward the dry Hotlands, as if some sort of migration were under way. Perhaps so. To a fux the interior was holier than the coast, and the holiest place of all was the great jagged central peak that the colonists called Mount Olympus, directly under Argo, where the air was hot enough to make water boil and where only the most specialized of living creatures could survive. Fuxes would die in that blazing, terrible highland desert almost as quickly as humans, but maybe, Morrissey thought, they wanted to get as close as possible to the holy mountain as the time of the earthquake approached. The coming round of the earthquake cycle was the central event of fux cosmology, after all: a millennial time, a time of wonders.

He counted fifty separate bands of migrating fuxes. He wondered whether his friend Dinov was among them. Suddenly he realized how strong was his need to find Dinov waiting at Argoview Dunes when he returned from his journey around Medea.

The circuit of the district took less than an hour. When the Dunes came into view again, the flitter performed a dainty pirouette over the town and shot off northward along the coast.

The route Morrissey had in mind would take him up the west coast as far as Arca, across the Hollands to Northcape, and down the other coast to tropical Madagozar before crossing back to the Dunes. Thus he would neatly touch base wherever mankind might have left an imprint on Medea.

Medea was divided into two huge hemispheres separated by the watery girdle of the Ring Ocean. But Farside was a glaciated wasteland that never felt Argo's warmth, and no permanent settlements had ever been founded there, only research camps, and in the last four hundred years very few of those. The original purpose of the Medea colony had been scientific study, the painstaking exploration of a wholly alien environment. But of course, as time goes on, original purposes have a way of being forgotten. Even on the warm continent human occupation had been limited to twin arcs along the coasts from the tropics through the high temperate latitudes and timid incursions a few hundred kilometers inland. The high desert was uninhabitable, and few humans found the bordering Hotlands hospitable, although the balloons and even some tribes of fuxes seemed to like the climate there. The only other place where humans had planted themselves was on the Ring Ocean itself, where some floating raft cities had been constructed in the kelp-choked equatorial water. But during the ten centuries of Medea the widely scattered human enclaves had sent out amoeboid extensions until they were nearly continuous for thousands of kilometers.

Morrissey saw that now the iron band of urban sprawl was cut again and again by intrusions of dense underbrush. Great patches of orange and yellow foliage already had begun to smother highways, airports, commercial plazas, residential suburbs.

What the jungle had begun, he thought, the earthquake would finish.

On the third day Morrissey saw Hanson Island ahead of him, a dark orange slash against the breast of the sea, and soon the flitter was making its approach to the airstrip at Port Kato on the big island's eastern shore. Morrissey tried to make radio contact but got only static or silence. He decided to land anyway.

Hanson Island had never had much of a human population. It had been set aside from the beginning as an ecological study

laboratory, because its population of strange life forms had developed in isolation from the mainland for thousands of years. And somehow it had kept its special status even in Medea's boom years.

A few groundcars were parked at the airstrip. Morrissey found one that still held a charge, and ten minutes later he was in Port Kato.

The place stank of red mildew. The buildings, wicker huts with thatched roofs, were falling apart. Angular trees of a species Morrissey did not recognize sprouted everywhere, in the streets, on rooftops, in the crowns of other trees. A cool, hard-edged wind was blowing out of Farside. Two fuxes, four-legged females herding some young six-leggers, wandered out of a tumble-down warehouse and stared at him in what was surely astonishment. Their pelts were so blue that they seemed black—the island species, different from mainlanders.

"You come back?" one asked. Local accent, too.

"Just for a visit. Are there any humans here?"

"You," said the other fux. He thought they found him amusing. "Ground shake soon. You know?"

"I know," he said.

They nuzzled their young and wandered away.

For three hours Morrissey explored Port Kato, holding himself aloof from emotion, not letting the decay get to him. It looked as

if the place had been abandoned for at least fifty years. More likely only five or six, though.

Late in the day he entered a small house where the town met the forest and found a functioning persona cube setup.

The cubes were clever things. You could record yourself in an hour or so: facial gestures, motion habits, voice, speech patterns. Scanners identified certain broad patterns of mental response and coded those into the cube, too. What the cube playback provided was a plausible imitation of a human being, the best possible memento of a loved one or friend or mentor, an electronic phantom programmed to absorb data and modify its own program, so that it could engage in conversation, ask questions, pretend to be the person who had been cubed. A soul in a box, a cunning device.

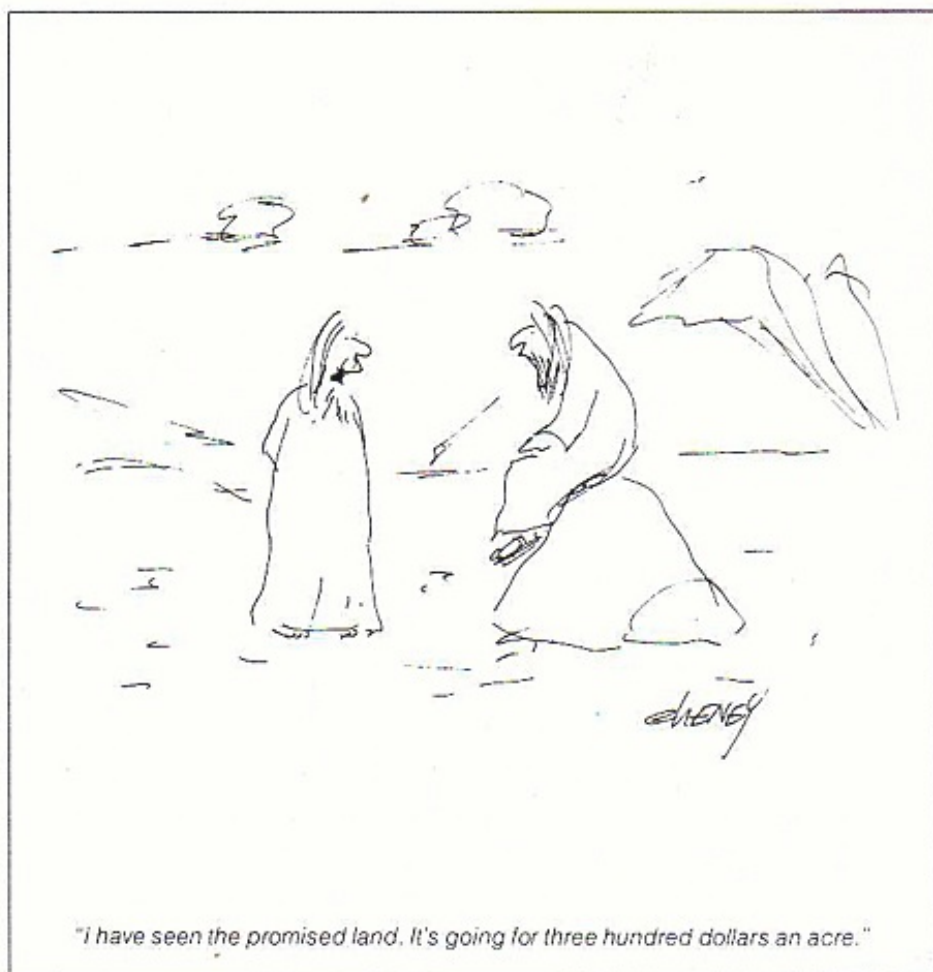
Morrissey jacked the cube into its receptor slot. The screen displayed a thin-lipped man with a high forehead and a lean, agile body. "My name is Leopold Brannum," he said at once. "My specialty is xenogenetics. What year is this?"

"It's Ninety-seven, autumn," Morrissey answered. "Ten weeks and a bit before the earthquake."

"And who are you?"

"Nobody particular. I just happen to be visiting Port Kato, and I felt like talking to someone."

"So talk," Brannum said. "What's going



"I have seen the promised land. It's going for three hundred dollars an acre."

on in Port Kato?"

"Nothing. It's pretty damned quiet here. The place is empty."

"The whole town's been evacuated?"

"The whole planet, for all I know. Just me and the fuxes and the balloons still around. When did you leave, Brannum?"

"Summer of Ninety-two," said the man in the cube.

"I don't see why everyone ran away so early. There wasn't any chance the earthquake would come before the predicted time."

"I didn't run away," Brannum said coldly. "I left Port Kato to continue my research by other means."

"I don't understand."

"I went to join the balloons," Brannum said.

Morrissey caught his breath. The words touched his soul with wintry bleakness.

"My wife did that," he said after a moment. "Perhaps you know her now. Nadia Dutoit. She was from Chong, originally —"

The face on the screen smiled sourly. "You don't seem to realize," Brannum said, "that I'm only a recording."

"Of course. Of course."

"I don't know where your wife is now. I don't even know where I am now. I can only tell you that wherever we are, it's in a place of great peace, of utter harmony."

"Yes, of course," Morrissey remembered the terrible day when Nadia told him that she could no longer resist the spiritual

communion of the aerial creatures, that she was going off to seek entry into the collective mind of the Ahya. All through the history of Medea some colonists had done that. No one had ever seen any of them again. Their souls, people said, were absorbed, and their bodies lay buried somewhere beneath the dry ice of Farside. Toward the end the frequency of such defections had doubled and doubled and doubled again, thousands of colonists every month giving themselves up to whatever mystic engulfment the balloons offered. To Morrissey it was a form of suicide; to Nadia, to Brannum, to all those other hordes, it had been the path to eternal bliss. Who was to say? Better to undertake the uncertain journey into the great mind of the Ahya, perhaps, than to set out in panicky flight for the alien and unforgiving world that was Earth. "I hope you've found what you were looking for," Morrissey said. "I hope she has."

He unjacked the cube and left quickly.

He flew northward over the fog-streaked sea. Below him were the floating cities of the tropical waters, that marvelous tapestry of rafts and barges. That must be Port Backside down there, he decided — a sprawling, intricate tangle of foliage under which lay the crumbling splendors of one of Medea's greatest cities. Kelp choked the waterways. There was no sign of human life down there, and so he did not land.

Pellucidar, on the mainland, was empty also. Morrissey spent four days there, visiting the undersea gardens, treating himself to a concert in the famous Hall of Columns, watching the suns set from the top of Crystal Pyramid. That last evening dense drifts of balloons, hundreds of them, flew oceanward above him. He imagined he heard them calling to him in soft, sighing whispers, saying, *I am Nadia. Come to me. There's still time. Give yourself up to us, dear love. I am Nadia.*

Was it only imagination? The Ahya were seductive. They had called to Nadia, and ultimately Nadia had gone to them. Brannum had gone. Thousands had gone. Now he felt the pull himself, and it was real. For an instant it was tempting. Instead of perishing in the quake, life eternal — of a sort. Who knew what the balloons really offered? A merging, a loss of self, a transcendental bliss. Or was it only delusion, folly? Had the seekers found nothing but a quick death in the icy wastes? *Come to me. Come to me.* Either way, he thought, it meant peace.

I am Nadia. Come to me.

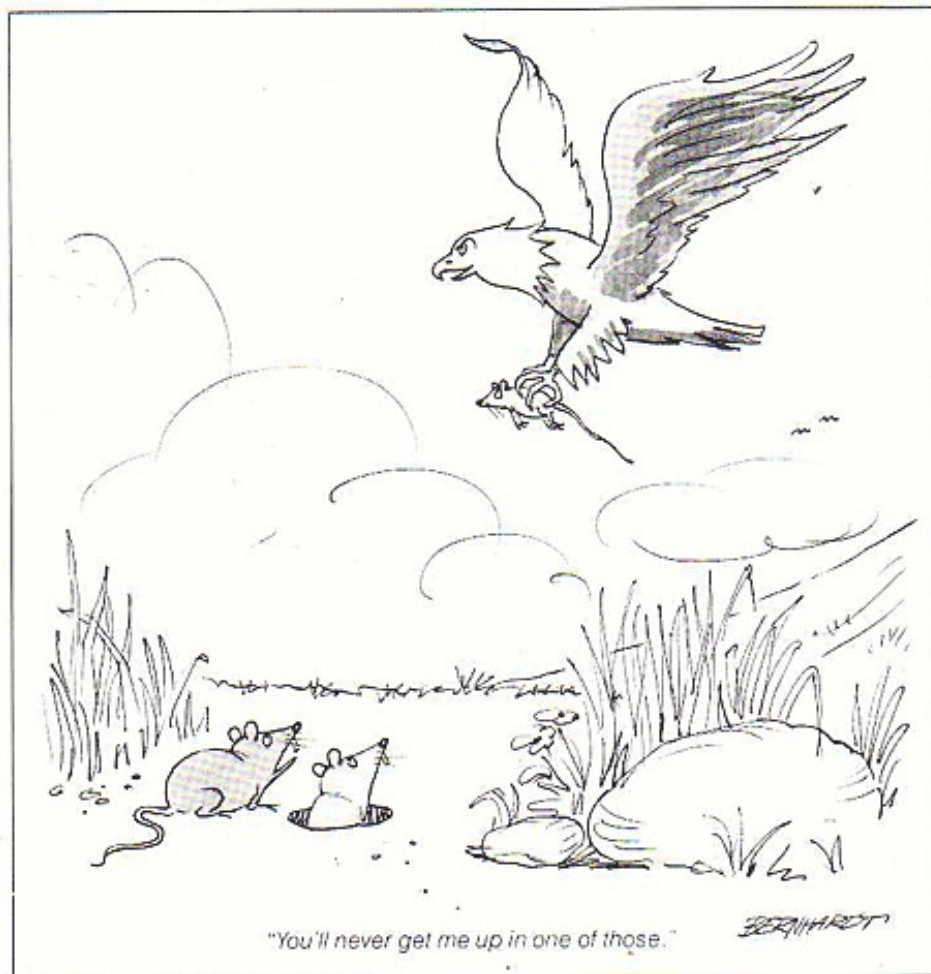
He stared a long while at the bobbing, shimmering globes overhead, and the whispers grew to a roar in his mind.

Then he shook his head. Union with the cosmic entity was not for him. He had sought no escape from Medea up till now, and now he would have none. He was himself and nothing but himself, and when he went out of the world, he would still be only himself. And then, only then, the balloons could have his soul.

It was nine weeks and a day before the earthquake when Morrissey reached sweltering Enrique, right on the equator. Enrique was celebrated for its Hotel Luxe, of legendary opulence. He took possession of its grandest suite, and no one was there to tell him no. The air conditioning still worked, the bar was well stocked, the hotel grounds still were manicured daily by fux gardeners who did not seem to know that their employers had gone away. Obliging servomechanisms provided Morrissey with meals of supreme elegance that would each have cost him a month's earnings in the old days. As he wandered through the silent grounds, he thought how wonderful it would have been to come here with Nadia and Danielle and Paul. But it was meaningless now, to be alone in all this luxury.

Was he alone, though? On his first night, and again the next, he heard laughter in the darkness, borne on the dense, sweet-scented air. Fuxes did not laugh. The balloons did not laugh.

On the morning of the third day, as he stood on his nineteenth-floor veranda, he saw movements in the shrubbery at the rim of the lawn. Five, seven, a dozen male fuxes, grim two-legged engines of lust, prowling through the bushes. And then a human form! Pale flesh, bare legs, long, unkempt hair! She streaked through the underbrush, giggling, pursued by fuxes.



"You'll never get me up in one of those."

"Hello!" Morrissey called. "Hey! I'm up here!"

He hurried downstairs and spent all day searching the hotel grounds. Occasionally he caught glimpses of frenzied naked figures, leaping and cavorting far away. He cried out to them, but they gave no sign of hearing him.

In the hotel office Morrissey found the manager's cube and turned it on. She was a dark-haired young woman, somewhat wild-eyed. "Hey, is it earthquake time yet?"

"Not quite yet."

"I want to be around for that. I want to see this stinking hotel crumble."

"Where have you gone?" Morrissey asked.

She snickered. "Where else? Into the bush. Off to hunt fuxes. And to be hunted." Her face was flushed. "The old recombinant genes are still pretty hot, you know? Me for the fuxes and the fuxes for me. Get yourself a little action, why don't you? Whoever you are."

Morrissey supposed he ought to be shocked. But he couldn't summon much indignation. He had already heard rumors of things like this. In the final years before the cataclysm, he knew, several sorts of migration had been going on. Some colonists opted for the exodus to Earth, and some for the surrender to the Ahyia soul collective, and others chose the simple reversion to the life of the beast. Why not? Every Medean, by now, was a mongrel. The underlying Earth stock was tinged with alien genes. The colonists looked human enough, but they were in fact mixed with balloon or fux or both. Without the early recombinant manipulations the colony could never have survived, for human life and native Medean organisms were incompatible, and only by genetic splicing had a race been brought forth that could overcome that natural biological enmity. So now, with doom-time coming near, how many colonists had simply thrown off their clothes and slipped away into the jungles to run with their cousins the fuxes? And was that any worse, he wondered, than climbing in panic aboard a ship bound for Earth, or giving up one's individuality to merge with the balloons? What did it matter which route to escape was chosen? But Morrissey wanted no escape. Least of all into the jungles, off to the fuxes.

He flew on northward. In Catamount he heard the cube of the city's mayor tell him, "They've all cleared out, and I'm going next Dimday. There's nothing left here." In Yellowleaf a cubed biologist spoke of genetic drift, the reversion to the alien genes. In Sandy's Mishigos Morrissey could find no cubes at all, but eighteen or twenty skeletons lay chaotically on the broad central plaza. Mass immolation? Mass murder, in the final hours of the city's disintegration? He gathered the bones and buried them in the moist, spongy, ochre soil. It took him all day. Then he went on, up the coast as far as Arca, through city after city.

Wherever he stopped it was the same story: no humans left, only balloons and fuxes, most of the balloons heading out to sea and most of the fuxes migrating inland. He jacked in cubes wherever he found them, but the cube people had little news to tell him. They were clearing out, they said. One way or another they were giving up on Medea. Why stay around to the end? Why wait for the big shudder? Going home, going to the balloons, going to the bush—clearing out, clearing out, clearing out.

So many cities, Morrissey thought. *Such an immense outpouring of effort. We smothered this world. We came in, we built our little isolated research stations, we stared in wonder at the coruscating sky and the double suns and the bizarre creatures, and we transformed ourselves into Medeans and transformed Medea into a kind of crazy imitation of Earth, and for a thousand years we spread out along the coasts wherever our kind of life could dig itself in. Eventually we lost sight of our pur-*

● *Morrissey dared not approach that mountain. It was holy and deadly. Its thermal updrafts could send his flitter spinning to ground like a swatted fly, and he was not quite ready to die.* ●

pose in coming here, which in the beginning was to learn. But we stayed anyway. We just stayed. We muddled along. And then we found out that it was all for nothing, that with one mighty heave of its shoulders this world was going to cast us off, and we got scared and packed up and went away. Sad, he thought. Sad and foolish.

He stayed at Arca a few days and turned inland, across the bleak desert that sloped upward toward Mount Olympus. It was seven weeks and a day until the quake. For the first thousand kilometers or so he still could see encampments of migrating fuxes below him, slowly making their way into the Hotlands. Why, he wondered, had they permitted their world to be taken from them? *They could have fought back. In the beginning they could have wiped us out in a month of guerrilla warfare. Instead they let us come in, let us make them into pets and slaves and flunkies while we paved the most fertile zones of their planet, and whatever they thought about us they kept to themselves. We never even knew their own name for Medea, Morrissey thought. That was how little of themselves they shared with us. But they tolerated us here. Why?*

The land below him was furnace hot, a badland streaked with red and yellow and orange, and now there were no fuxes in sight. The first jagged foothills of the Olympus scarp knobbed the desert. He saw the mountain itself rising like a black fang toward the heavy, low-hanging, sky-filling mass of Argo. Morrissey dared not approach that mountain. It was holy and deadly. Its thermal updrafts could send his flitter spinning to ground like a swatted fly, and he was not quite ready to die.

He swung northward again and journeyed up the barren and forlorn heart of the continent toward the polar regions. The Ring Ocean came into view, coiling like a world-swallowing serpent beyond the polar shores, and he kicked the flitter higher, almost to its maximum safety level, to give himself a peek at Farside, where white rivers of carbon dioxide flowed through the atmosphere and lakes of cold gases flooded the valleys. It seemed like six thousand years ago that he had led a party of geologists into that forbidding land. How earnest they had all been then! Measuring fault lines and seeking to discover the effects the quake would have over there. As if such things mattered. Why had he bothered? The quest for pure knowledge, yes. How futile that quest seemed to him now. Of course he had been much younger then. An eon ago. Almost in another life. Morrissey had planned to fly into Farside on this trip, to bid formal farewell to the scientist he had been, but he changed his mind. There was no need. Some farewells had already been made.

He curved down out of the polar regions as far south as Northcape on the eastern coast, circled the wondrous red-glinting sweep of the High Cascades, and landed on the airstrip at Chong. It was six weeks and two days to the earthquake. In these high latitudes the twin suns were faint and feeble even though the day was a Sunday. The monster Argo itself, far to the south, appeared shrunken. He had forgotten the look of the northern sky while spending ten years in the tropics. And yet had he not lived thirty years in Chong? It seemed like only a moment ago now, as all time collapsed into this instant of now.

Morrissey found Chong painful, too many old associations, too many cues to memory. Yet he kept himself there until he had seen it all, the restaurant where he and Nadia had invited Danielle and Paul to join their marriage, the house on Vladimir Street where they had lived, the geophysics lab, the skiing lodge just beyond the Cascades. All the footprints of his life.

The city and its environs were utterly deserted. For day after day Morrissey wandered, reliving the time when he was young and Medea still lived. How exciting it had all been then! The quake was coming someday—everybody knew the day, down to the hour—but nobody cared except cranks and neurotics, for the others were too busy living. And then suddenly everyone cared, and everything changed.

Morrissey played no cubes in Chong. The city itself, gleaming, a vast palisade of silver thermal roofs, was one great cube for him, crying out the tale of his years.

When he could take it no longer, he started his southward curve around the east coast. There were four weeks and a day to go.

His first stop was Meditation Island, the jumping-off point for those who went to visit Virgil Oddum's fantastic and ever-evolving ice sculptures out on Farside. Four newlyweds had come here, a billion years ago, and had gone, laughing and embracing, off in icecrawlers to see the one miracle of art Medea had produced. Morrissey found the cabin where they all had stayed. It had faded and its roof was askew. He had thought of spending the night on Meditation Island, but he left after an hour.

Now the land grew lush again as he passed into the upper tropics. Again he saw balloons by the score letting themselves be wafted toward the ocean, and again there were bands of fuxes journeying inland, driven by he knew not what sense of ritual obligation as the quake neared.

Three weeks, two days, five hours, plus or minus.

He flew low over the fuxes. Some were mating. That astounded him—that persistence of lust in the face of calamity. Was it merely the irresistible biological drive that kept the fuxes coupling? What chance did the newly engendered young have to sur-

vive? Would their mothers not be better off with empty wombs when the quake came? They all knew what was going to happen, and yet they mated. It made no sense to Morrissey.

And then he thought he understood. The sight of those coupling fuxes gave him an insight into the Medean natives that explained it all, for the first time. Their patience, their calmness, their tolerance of all that had befallen them since their world had become Medea. Of course they would mate as the catastrophe drew near! They had been waiting for the earthquake all along, and for them it was no catastrophe. It was a holy moment—a purification—so he realized. He wished he could discuss this with Dinoov. It was a temptation to return at once to Argoview Dunes and seek out the old fux and test on him the theory that had just sprung to life in him. But not yet. Port Medea, first.

The east coast had been settled before the other, and the density of development here was intense. The first two colonies—Touchdown City and Medeatown—had long ago coalesced into the urban smear that radiated outward from the third town, Port Medea. When he was still far to the north, Morrissey could see the gigantic peninsula on which Port Medea and its suburbs sprawled. The tropic heat rose in visible waves from it, buffeting his little flitter as he made his way toward that awesome, hideous concrete expanse.

Dinoov had been correct. There were starships waiting at Port Medea—four of them, a waste of money beyond imagination. Why had they not been used in the exodus? Had they been set aside for emigrants who had decided instead to run with the rutting fuxes or to give their souls to the balloons? He would never know. He entered one of the ships and said, "Operations directory."

"At your service," a bodiless voice replied.

"Give me a report on ship status. Are you prepared for a voyage to Earth?"

"Fueled and ready."

"And the coldsleep equipment?"

"Everything operational."

Morrissey calculated his moves. So easy, he thought, to lie down and go to sleep and let the ship take me to Earth. So easy, so automatic, so useless.

Then he said, "How long do you need to reach departure level?"

"One hundred sixty minutes from moment of command."

"Good. The command is given. Get yourself ticking and take off. Your destination is Earth, and the message I give you is this: Medea says goodbye. I thought you might have some use for this ship. Sincerely, Daniel F. Morrissey. Dated Earthquake minus two weeks one day seven hours."

"Acknowledged. Departure-level procedures initiated."

"Have a good flight," Morrissey told the ship.

He entered the second ship and gave it the same command. He did the same in the third. He paused before entering the last one, wondering whether there were other colonists who even now were desperately racing toward Port Medea to get aboard one of these ships before the end came. To hell with them, Morrissey thought. They should have made up their minds sooner. He told the fourth ship to go home to Earth.

On his way back from the port to the city he saw the four bright spears of light rise skyward, a few minutes apart. Each hovered a moment, outlined against Argo's colossal bulk, and shot swiftly into the aurora-dappled heavens. In sixty-one years they would descend onto a baffled Earth with their cargo of no one. Another great mystery of space to delight the tale-tellers, he thought. The Voyage of the Empty Ships.

With a curious sense of accomplishment he left Port Medea and headed down the coast to the sleek resort of Madagozar, where the elite of Medea had amused themselves in tropic luxury. Morrissey had always thought the place absurd. But it was still intact, still purring with automatic precision. He treated himself to a lavish holiday there. He raided the wine cellars of the best hotels, breakfasted on tubs of chilled spikelegs caviar, dozed in the warm sun, bathed in the juice of gilliwog flowers, and thought about absolutely nothing at all.

The day before the earthquake he flew



back to Argoview dunes.

"So you chose not to go home after all," Dinoov said.

Morrissey shook his head. "Earth was never my home. Medea was my home. I went home to Medea. And then I came back to this place, because it was my last home. I am pleased that you're still here, Dinoov."

"Where would I have gone?" the fux asked.

"The rest of your people are migrating inland. I think it's to be nearer the holy mountain when the end comes. Is that right?"

"That is right."

"Then why have you stayed?"

"This is my home, too. I have so little time left that it matters not very much to me where I am when the ground shakes. But tell me, friend Morrissey, was your journey worth the taking?"

"It was."

"What did you see? What did you learn?"

"I saw Medea, all of it," Morrissey said. "I never realized how much of your world we took. By the end we covered all the land that was worth covering, didn't we? And you people never said a word. You stood by and let it happen."

The fux was silent.

Morrissey said, "I understand now. You were waiting for the earthquake all along, weren't you? You knew it was coming long

before we bothered to figure it out. How many times has it happened since fuxes first evolved on Medea? Every seventy-one hundred sixty years the fuxes move to high ground and the balloons drift to Farside and the ground shakes and everything falls apart. And then the survivors reappear, with new life already in the wombs, and build again. So you knew, when we came here, when we built our towns everywhere and turned them into cities, when we rounded you up and made you work for us, when we mixed our genes with yours and changed the microbes in the air so we'd be more comfortable here, that what we were doing wouldn't last forever, right? That was your secret knowledge, your hidden consolation, that this, too, would pass. Eh, Dinoov? And now it has passed. We're gone, and the happy young fuxes are mating. I'm the only one of my kind left, except for a few naked crazies in the bush."

There was a glint in the fux's eyes. Amusement? Contempt? Compassion? Who could read a fux's eyes?

"All along," Morrissey said, "you were all just waiting for the earthquake. Right? The earthquake that would make everything whole again. Well, now it's almost upon us. And I'm going to stand here alongside you and wait for the earthquake, too. It's my contribution to interspecies harmony. I'll be the human sacrifice. I'll be the one who atones for all that we did here. How does that sound, Dinoov?"

"I wish," the fux said slowly, "that you had boarded one of those ships and gone back to Earth. Your death will give me no pleasure."

Morrissey nodded. "I'll be back in a few minutes." He went into his cabin.

The cubes of Nadia and Paul and Danielle sat beside the screen. Not for years had he played them, but he jacked them into the slots now, and on the screen appeared the three people he had most loved in all the universe. They smiled at him, and Danielle offered a soft greeting, and Paul winked, and Nadia blew a kiss. Morrissey said, "It's almost over now. Today's earthquake day. I just wanted to say goodbye, that's all. I just wanted to tell you that I love you and I'll be with you soon."

"Dan—" Nadia said.

"No. You don't have to say anything. I know you aren't really there, anyway. I just wanted to see you all again. I'm very happy right now."

He took the cubes from their slots. The screen went dark. Gathering up the cubes, he carried them outside and carefully buried them in the soft, moist soil of his garden. The fux watched him incuriously.

"Dinoov," Morrissey called, "one last question."

"Yes, my friend?"

"All the years we lived on Medea, we were never able to learn the name by which you people called your own world. We kept trying to find out, but all we were told was that it was taboo, and even when we coaxed a fux into telling us the name, the next fux would tell us an entirely different name. So we never knew. I ask you a special favor now, here at the end. Tell me what you call your world. Please. I need to know."

The old fux said, "We call it Sanoon."

"Sanoon? Truly?"

"Truly," said the fux.

"What does it mean?"

"Why, it means the world," said Dinoov. "What else?"

The earthquake was thirty minutes away—plus or minus a little. During the past hour the white suns had disappeared behind Argo. Morrissey had not noticed that. But now he heard a low rumbling roar, and then he felt a strange trembling in the ground, as if something mighty were stirring beneath his feet and would burst shortly into wakefulness. Not far from shore terrible waves rose and crashed.

Calmly Morrissey said, "This is it, I think."

Overhead, a dozen gleaming balloons soared and bobbed in a dance that looked much like a dance of triumph.

There was thunder in the air and a writhing in the heart of the world. In another moment the full force of the quake would be upon them, and the crust of the planet would quiver and the awful tremors would rip the land apart and the sea would rise up and cover the coast. Morrissey began to weep, and not out of fear. He managed a smile. "The cycle's complete, Dinoov. Out of Medea's ruins Sanoon will rise. The place is yours again at last." ☐



"Good news and bad news. Good news: The Ice Age blizzard left only four feet of snow last night instead of six feet. Bad news: It's August."

*Eschewing rhetorical
obfuscation, he fabricated the perfect
anti-amphibological machine!*

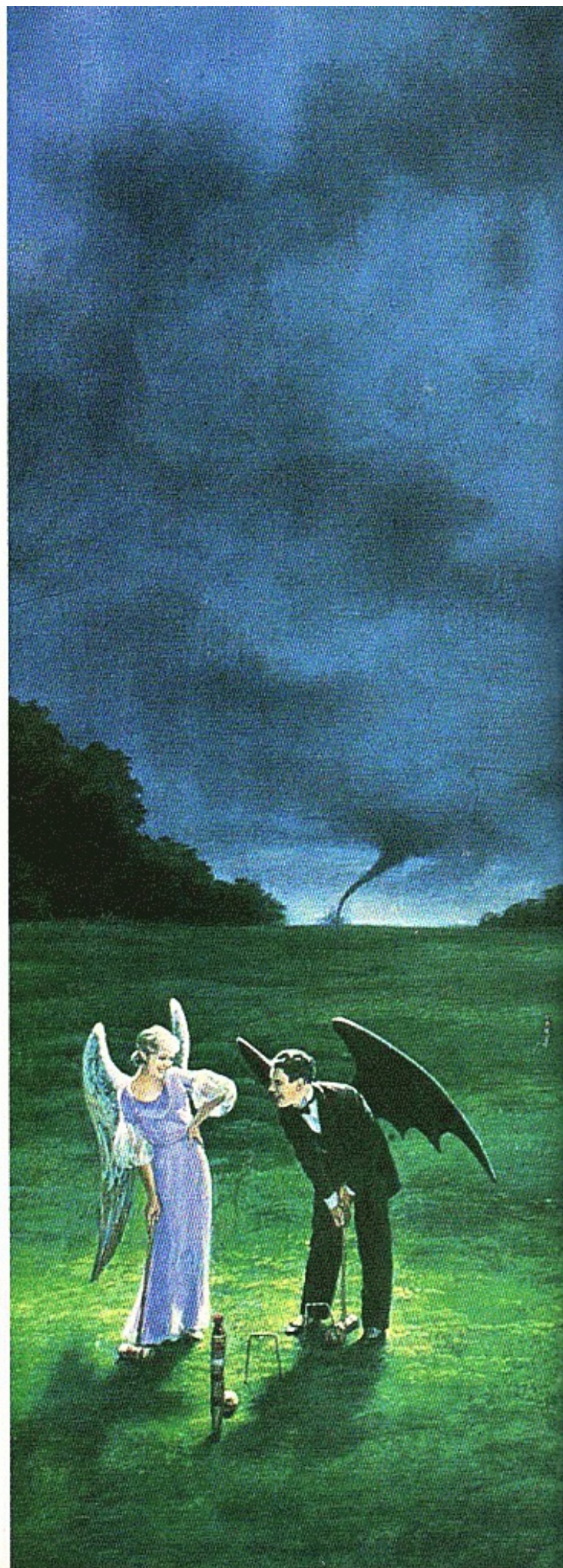
THE LANGUAGE CLARIFIER

BY PAUL J. NAHIN

The idea for the invention came during the divorce. He knew he was going to be screwed, but with the legal mumbo jumbo of the separation agreements, he couldn't figure out *how* he was being screwed. Janet's damn lawyer had drawn them up—he'd even given the go-ahead for that, as he hadn't planned to contest her. After all, he *had* been caught in a rather blatant, clear-cut position of adultery. At the time, he had thought the wild-passioned honey-blonde had been worth it, but now he was beginning to have doubts.

He had a doctorate in semantics and was the author of two scholarly tomes on the meaning and structure of words, but Professor Willard Watson still couldn't understand what in hell was going on. Did he or didn't he get to keep the car? How about the house, the savings account, the cat and dog, the antique hutch, the silver, the ski equipment, the home library, the television sets, and all the rest of the earthly possessions collected over twenty-five years of marriage? And what about alimony? Asking Janet's fathead lawyer led merely to the receipt of additional incomprehensible letters, notices, and other horrible documents. Just what the heck *did it mean* to receive a letter saying: Notice is

PAINTING BY EVELYN TAYLOR





hereby granted to Willard Watson, the first party of aggravation with respect to the aggravated second party, Janet Watson, of an action for divorce, in the County of Orange of the State of California. Actions involved include but may not be fully delimited by their listing here; the exposure of the second party to loathsome disease by the first party due to participation in perverted crimes against the order of nature; public embarrassment of the second party due to the wanton, unrestrained, lascivious behavior of the first party. The second party maintains total freedom in the question of complicity of action, and, except in those cases where litigation proves contrariwise, sues for all common hereditaments, past, present, or future, to revert to the second party, except for the sole ownership of items, things, or other states of being in possession of the first party prior to the initial date of marriage between the first party and the second party.

Professor Watson was somewhat perplexed by all this. So he hired his own fathead lawyer.

What Professor Watson ended up with then was twice as much paper that he couldn't understand. Willard learned the truth of the old New England saying "A man between two lawyers is like a fish between two cats." So he fired his fathead lawyer. And he stayed up for three straight nights, mulling over his desperate situation, until the idea for the invention came to him. He quickly made an appointment to see his old friend at the college, Professor Sam Sklansky of the Physics Department.

It was a cold, windy, and rainy day in early October as Willard ran from the parking lot to Sklansky's office. His shoes soon filled with water, and he squished his way up the steps into the Physics Building. Even Nature was dumping on him now.

Sklansky's door was open, and he walked in, dripping, sloppy wet, with water slushing out of his hat brim onto the floor. "Hi, Sam. Thanks for seeing me so early in the morning." He stood there, looking like a lone, forlorn weed in the middle of a growing pool of water.

Sklansky, a brilliant, very direct sort of fellow, looked quizzically back. "So what's the problem, Willard? And by the way, umbrellas, raincoats, and boots have been invented! You some kind of health nut, running around in the rain like nature boy?"

"Look, Sam, I'm desperate, and I've had a lot of things on my mind besides the weather. I need your help, and I need it fast. Janet's going to rake me behind over the coals, but good, if I don't get someone to tell me what the divorce settlement she's serving on me means!"

"Willard, you want to see Professor Shyster over in the Law School. I deal in physical facts, mathematical validity, in cosmic truth, not in the mental hash-mash of lawyers!"

"No, Sam, another fathead lawyer isn't what I need. I need you. I want you to tell me if my idea is possible."

So, good friend that he was, Sam listened. At first he laughed hysterically, then he wrote a few equations, and seeing a little hope, he wrote some more. Then he became quietly excited, and finally, as Willard wrapped up his arguments, Sam became hysterical again, but this time it was with excitement. It *could* be done. The two old friends shook hands and agreed to begin construction that very weekend. Willard would provide the description of the necessary syntactical transformations, along with a complete table look-up dictionary of all the required synonyms, antonyms, and transitive verbs with irregular conjugations. Sam would provide the electronic expertise, produce the wiring schematics, order the parts, and do all the soldering.

It was just two weeks later that they stood in Sam's laboratory, looking at their gleaming creation. A cubical box, precisely 119 centimeters on an edge, it had a smooth, featureless appearance, with the double exception of two horizontal slots. One was

● Sam took the sheet over to the machine, and with an expression that was a mixture of glee and apprehension, held it up to the INPUT slot.
"Ready . . . ?"
Sam pushed the paper in. ●

marked INPUT and the other OUTPUT. It was ready for testing.

"Okay, Sam, you designed it, you can have the honor of the first test."

"No, it was your idea, so you go ahead."
"Please, Sam, I insist."

"Well—all right, I do just happen to have a test problem ready." So saying, Sam walked over to his desk, rolled a fresh piece of heavy white bond paper into his typewriter, and quickly snapped out in bold pica letters: Liquid precipitation fell from the heights, followed by the spherical solid version, with the process terminated by the reverse transport in the gaseous state.

Sam took the sheet over to the machine, and with an expression that was a mixture of glee and apprehension, held it up to the INPUT slot. "Ready, Willard?" At the nod of his friend's head, Sam pushed the paper in. After only a few seconds, another piece of paper shot from the output slot. Both men grabbed it in midair, and together read: First it rained, then it hailed, and finally the water evaporated.

"Well, I'll be damned!" they exclaimed in unison. The Language Clarifier worked.

"Hey, hey, hey, Sam, it looks good, it looks

good!" Willard began to paw through his briefcase, looking for his divorce papers. "Now I'll find out just what that scheming wife of mine is up to!"

"Wait, Willard," said Sam, as he placed a restraining hand on his friend's shoulder. "Let's not be hasty. We should really test it some more. Look here, I have a copy of today's campus newspaper carrying an interview with the Undergraduate Dean. Listen to this, will you, the perfect test!" He read aloud: "Even in institutions like our college, which may be expected to have rather homogeneous populations, one encounters a tremendous diversity in the family subcultures that students come from, in addition to the idiosyncratic mix of assets and liabilities that characterize them."

"Wow, Sam—do we dare put that into it? It could blow the circuits!"

"Might as well find out if the Language Clarifier really works, Willard." Sam soon had the Dean's words typed in clear, crisp, sharp letters. He shoved them into the INPUT slot, and the machine responded in seconds with: No two students are alike.

"Son of a gun, Sam, look at that! The translation actually makes sense. Try something else on it."

"Okay, Willard. Take a look at this—here's another quote from the Dean: 'We thus encounter students whose educational aims are crystal clear, as well as others whose purposes have all the clarity of an amorphous mist emanating from a thick cloud of existential miasma.'"

Quickly they typed this out and inserted it into their machine, and they were soon in possession of the machine's response: Some students know what they want, and the rest don't.

"That's enough for me, Sam—it works! Now, where the heck are those damn lawyer's papers!"

The rest is history. Willard found out what the divorce was going to cost him. He still got screwed, of course, but with the Language Clarifier deciphering the papers from Janet's fathead lawyer, he knew precisely how he was being screwed. Actually, Willard was really unconcerned, as he and Sam expected to make a bundle selling their machine to business, higher education, and government. Their need for clarification was well established. Let Janet have everything—secretly, Willard was happy to be rid of the damn cat and dog. He would recoup it all, and more, with the royalties from the Clarifier.

Willard let Sam handle the business end of the Language Clarifier, and it was with some greedy anticipation that he dropped in on him after the divorce was settled. Willard was flat broke.

"Okay, Sam, give me the news. How are we doing in selling the Clarifier?"

Sam opened his desk drawer, pulled out a piece of paper, and handed it across to Willard. It was a cashier's check for five thousand dollars. "There you are, Willard, your share of the proceeds from our first

three sales. And more to come!"

"Hot damn, Sam, I knew it! Who bought the first three machines—businessmen dealing with government regulatory agencies?"

Sam grinned at Willard. "Professor Shyster, over in the Law School, bought all three."

"Of course," exclaimed Willard, slapping his forehead with a hand. "Lawyers would be the prime users of the Clarifier, wouldn't they? Why, with all the ritual chants they produce, they'll be in the market for Clarifiers for the next fifty years. What's old Shyster going to do with them, anyway?"

"Actually, Willard, you've got it backward. Shyster is writing a law book, and he's found that his early drafts weren't really up to par as far as the publisher is concerned. Not scholarly-sounding enough, or something like that. So the Clarifier is just what he needed."

"I don't get it, Sam," said Willard, with a puzzled look on his face. "If Shyster's book isn't impressively complex enough, how's the Clarifier going to help?"

Sam leaned back in his chair with a pleased smile on his face. "Willard, my boy, there's an old rule of thumb in physics that says if a process works in one direction, it will almost always be true that it can go the other way, too."

Then Willard understood. "You don't mean, you couldn't possibly mean—"

"Yep, that's right. I just moved a couple of wires around, and now old Shyster just stuffs his clearly written book draft into the OUTPUT slot, and the most incomprehensible muddle you could possibly imagine emerges from the INPUT slot. Should be a legal best-seller."

Willard was stunned. The irony of it was mind-boggling! As he stared at Sam, his friend chuckled. "Look at it this way, Willard, how many of the lawyers who'll read it will really know, or even give a damn, whether they understand it or not?"

Before Willard could respond, Sam's secretary put her head into the office.

"Excuse me, Professor Sklansky, but this large envelope, from Washington, just came for you registered, special delivery. It looks important, so I thought I should give it to you right away."

"Yes, good, thank you, Susan." As the pretty young lady left, Willard found himself admiring her slender ankles, the motion of her firm thighs under a snug dress, her really spectacular bottom. "Careful, Willard," cautioned Sklansky, the always observant physicist. "As I recall, it was a blonde who did you in last time, and besides, she's the best damned secretary I've ever had. So stay away from her!"

"Ah, I suppose you're right, Sam, but she is a nifty-looking gal."

"Hmmp," grunted Sam, who had been reading the just-delivered mail. A slight frown was forming on his mouth. "Listen to this, Willard, it's from the Chief Legal Officer of Defense Research and Engineering in the Pentagon. Remember, I wrote to them

about the Language Clarifier—pointed out how they could use it to decipher the thousands of proposals they get from industrial contractors every year?"

He read: "Replying to your communication of 28 October, we have, after analysis of the broad ramifications of and pertaining to, in all its present and future forms, the Language Clarifier, found it to present a less than superior hold on the financial, economic, reputational, and any other forms of gain, physical or otherwise, of its inventors. In view of the willingness of said inventors to receive and accept a yearly stipend, in perpetuity, or for life, whichever terminates first, of one million dollars, they shall also accept the impact and import of the Military Secrecy Act of 1947, Title 12, Section 19.321 (see attached forms). Return of this document, with said inventors' signatures, will constitute a mutually satisfactory agreement. Otherwise, not."

Sam put the letter down on his desk and drummed his fingers on the hard wooden surface. "Well, Willard, what do you make of that? He idly flipped through the fifty-three single-spaced onionskin pages of the 1947 Military Secrecy Act. 'Frankly, Willard, it sounds to me like the bastards are afraid to have the Clarifier around! You know, if the military boys can use it to blow away the industrial proposal-writer's crap, I suppose industry could use it to dig through all the government's crud, too. Why, both sides would have to make sense. Imagine that!'"

"Christ, Sam, how the hell should I know? Look, let's run it through the Language Clarifier—you still have our prototype unit in your lab, right?"

"Right, Willard. Let's go!"

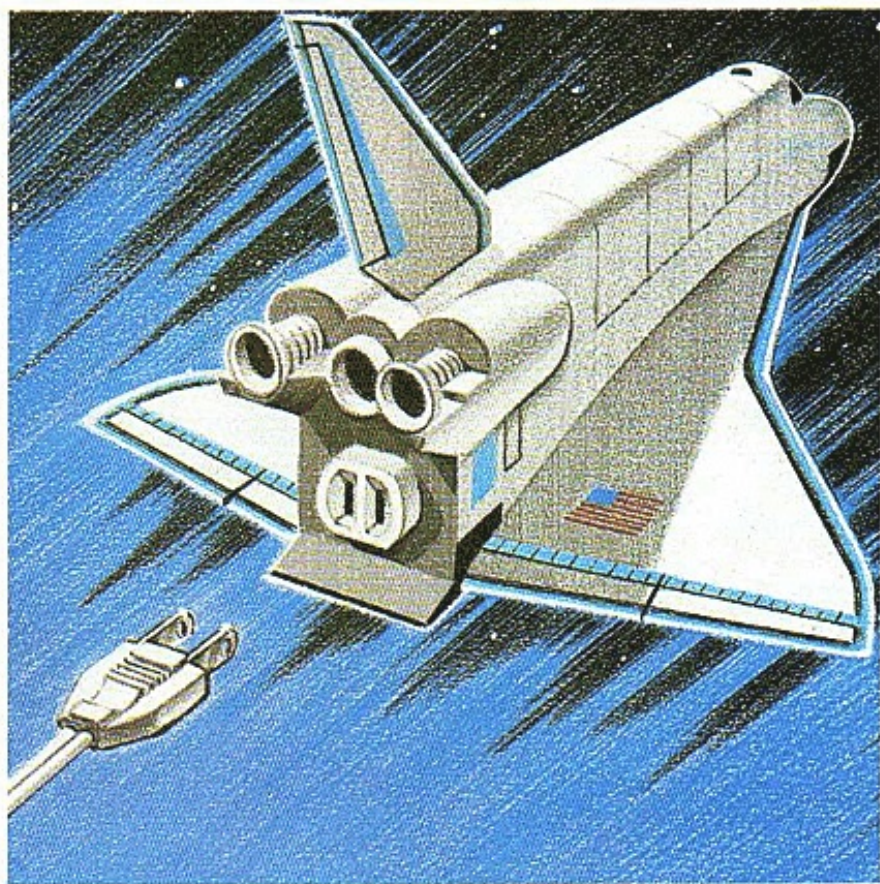
A few minutes later the INPUT slot gobbled up the Pentagon letter. Then the attached Military Secrecy Act of 1947 followed. A full forty-three seconds ticked by as the Clarifier mulled over its latest task. Deep in its bowels a few transistors grew hot, an amplifier oscillated with feedback, and a mechanical gear-train drive almost ground off a tooth or two. But finally the Clarifier finished. It ejected its response.

Sign the agreement, forget you ever heard of the Language Clarifier, and you get a megabuck a year for life. Don't sign the agreement, and they toss you in the slammer and throw away the key.

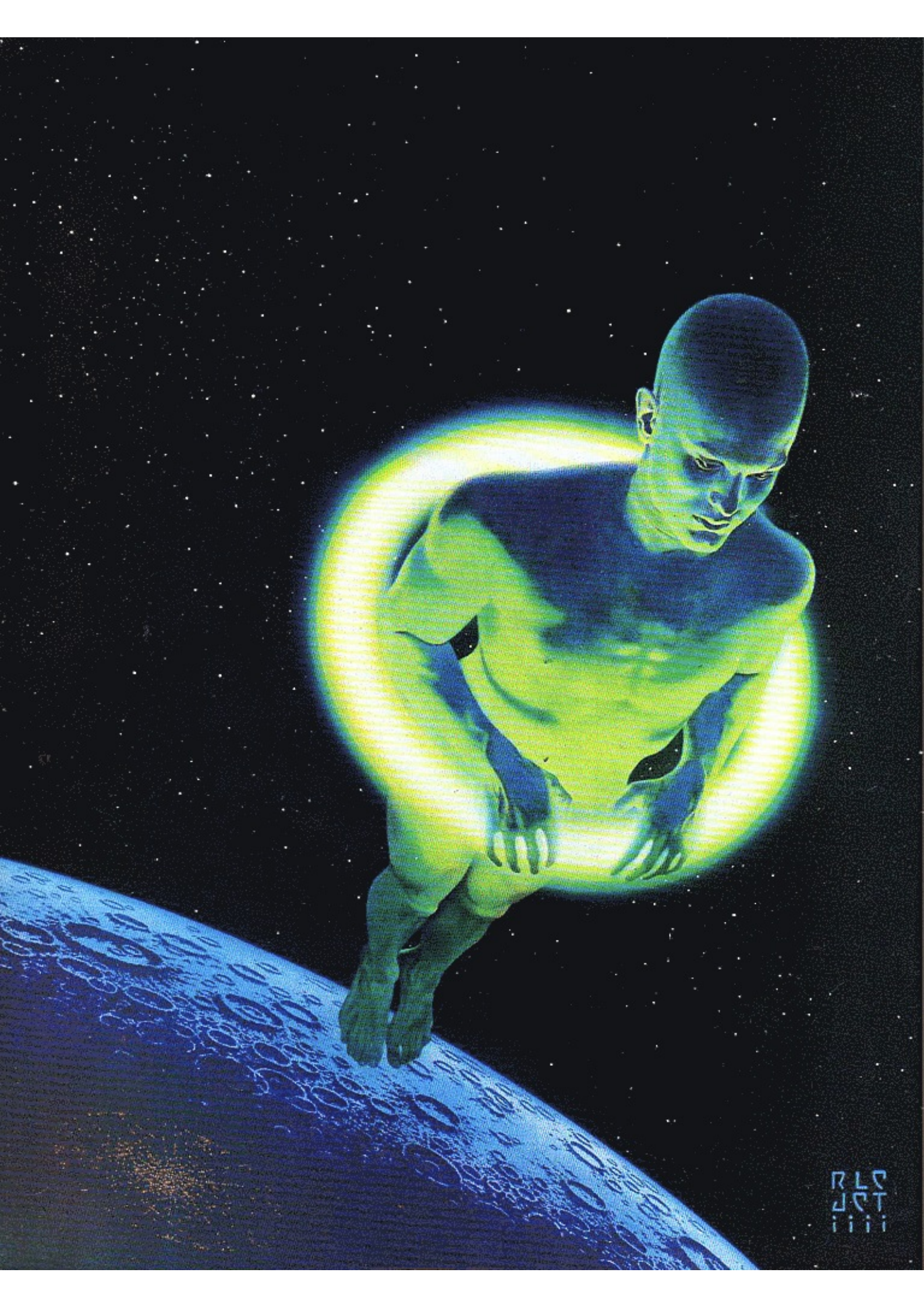
Sam lives in Hawaii now, retired from teaching, and is writing a book on the physics of hanging ten. Willard quit teaching, too, married Susan, and it would be indelicate to discuss what they are doing. Once a year they meet in San Francisco, split the million bucks, have a few drinks at Fisherman's Wharf, and ride the cablecar.

Oh, yes, Sam was right. Old Shyster's book was a best-seller, thus proving you don't have to be smart to get paid a million bucks for forgetting what you know, and doing nothing.

Quite often, merely being a fathead lawyer is sufficient. ∞



"Well, it seems to be all right in theory, but it's going to take a little more work..."



RLC
JCT
III

Warping the limits of
time plumbs the deepest sources
of wish fulfillment

TIME TRAVELERS



All of us share the impulse to escape the tedium of everyday life. The desire to travel through time reflects our unwillingness to live with things as they are. Time travel enables us to experience the romance of the past and the mystery of the future, to try to change our world.

H. G. Wells invented the modern time travel theme. In *The Time Machine* Wells's hero undertakes his journey out of scientific curiosity: "I saw the moon spinning swiftly through her quarters from new to full, and had a faint glimpse of the circling stars. . . . Gaining velocity, the palpitation

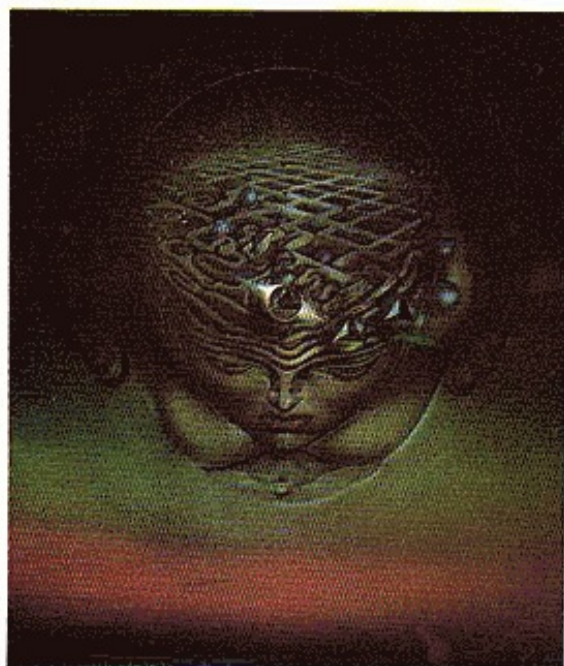
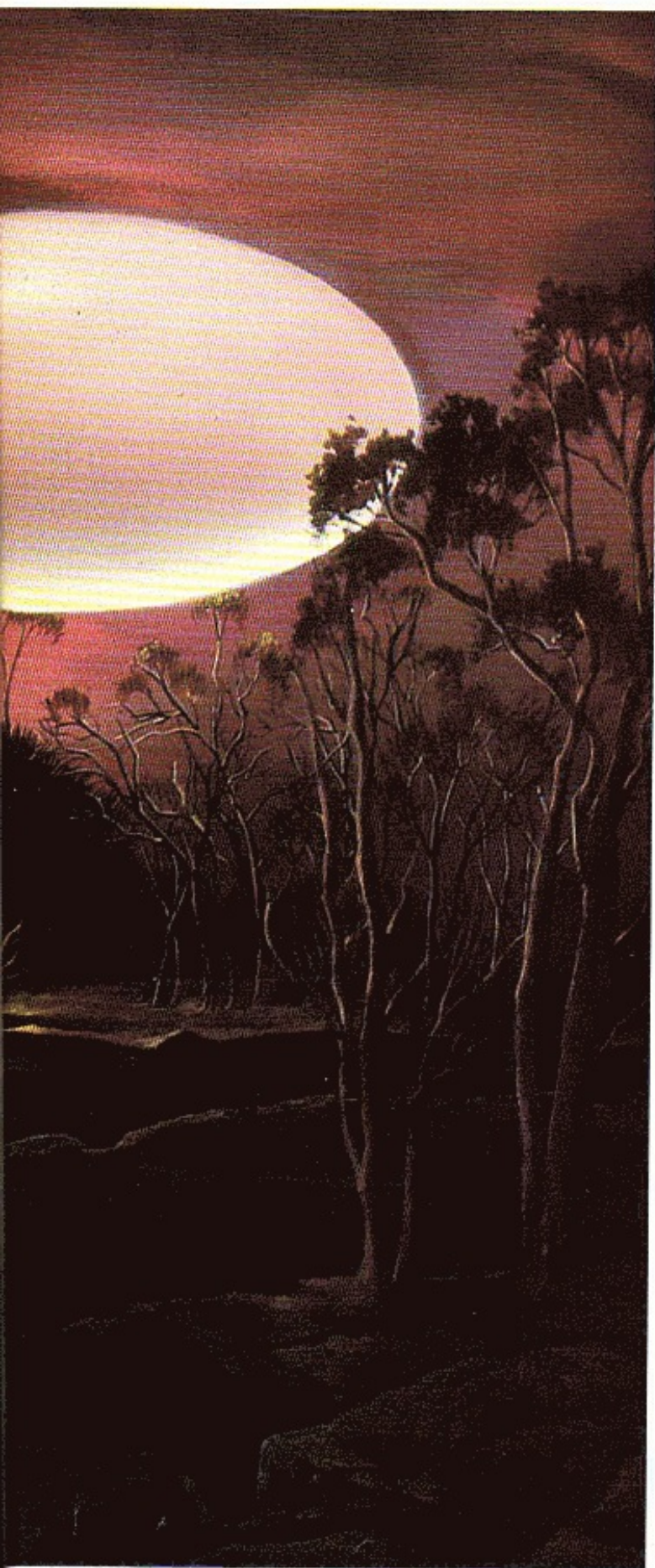
of night and day merged into one continuous greyness . . . the jerking sun became a streak of fire, a brilliant arch, in space. . . ."

In Harlan Ellison's "The Prowler in the City" the time traveler has no choice: ". . . suddenly . . . he was flooded with light. And when he looked up he was in that other place. Paused now, only a few minutes after the transfer, he leaned against the wall of the city and recalled the light."

Paintings by Richard Lon Cohen and Jon Townley (left), and Hans-Ulrich Osterwalder.

BY ELLEN DATLOW

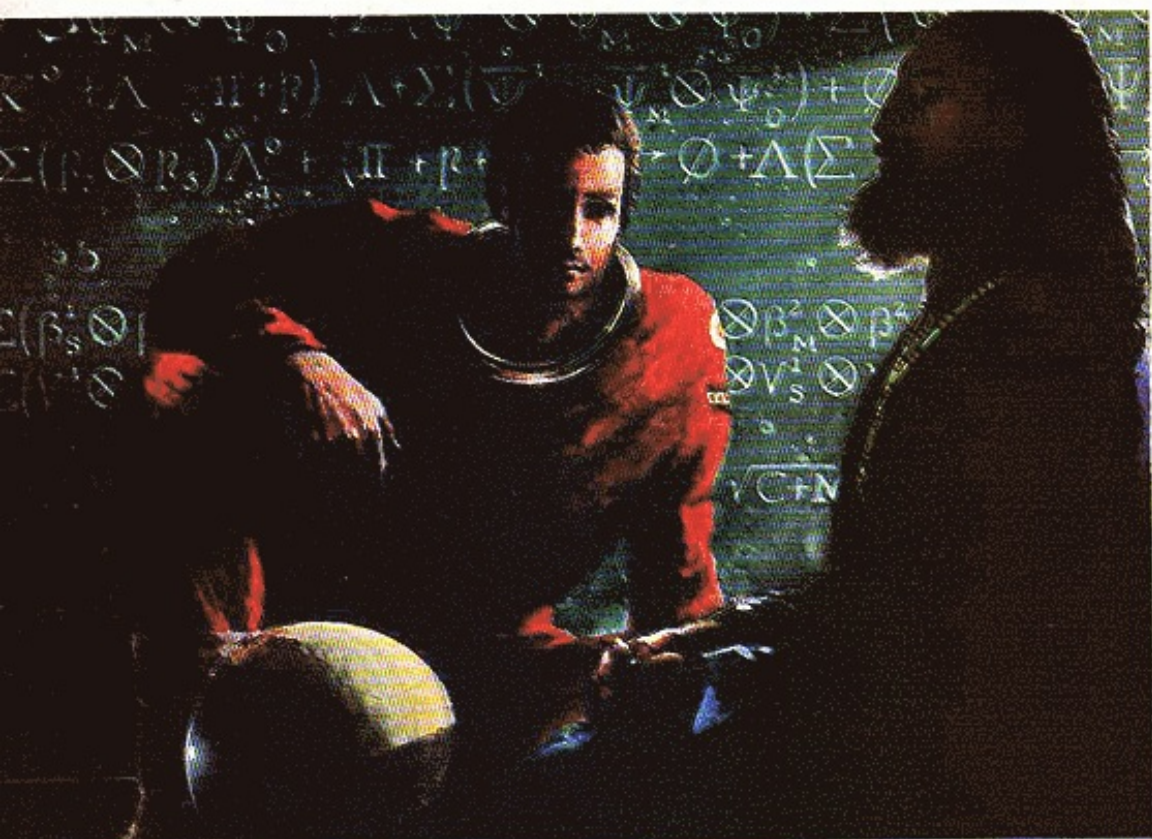




Time traveling presents unique risks. What if you went back in time and killed your own grandfather? Or what if you found yourself in the position of Philip K. Dick's hero in "A Little Something for Us Tempunauts"? "... then it hit him. We're in a closed time loop ... we keep going through this again and again ... each time imagining it's the first time. ..."

There are also blessings. An old doctor in C. M. Kornbluth's "The Little Black Bag" finds a unique medical kit from the future: "The blade sank in, miraculously cutting only the dead tissues ... declining to affect any system or organ except the one it was—tuned to, could you say?"

Paintings by Pamela Mower (left), Hans-Ulrich Osterwalder:



There are diverse views of the effects of traveling in time. One is presented by Henry Kuttner and C. L. Moore in "Vintage Season": "The physio-temporal course tends to slide back to its norm. . . . That is why it is so hard to force any alteration."

In his story "A Distant Thunder" Ray Bradbury warns that "a little error here would multiply in sixty million years, all out of proportion," changing the future.

And Michael Moorcock writes in *The Hollow Lands*: "... once a time traveler has visited the future he cannot return to the past ... if he did he could alter the course of the future. ..."

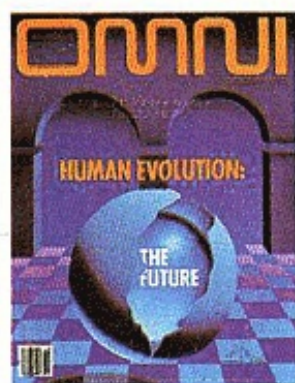
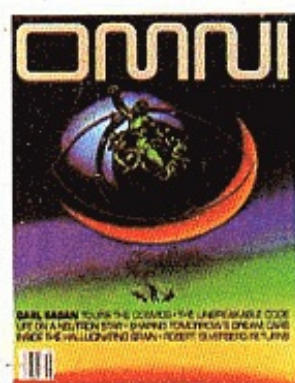
Today time travel is a dream; tomorrow we may wake to find it a reality. ∞

Paintings by (clockwise from above) John Hargis, Peter Knifton, and Michael Whalin.





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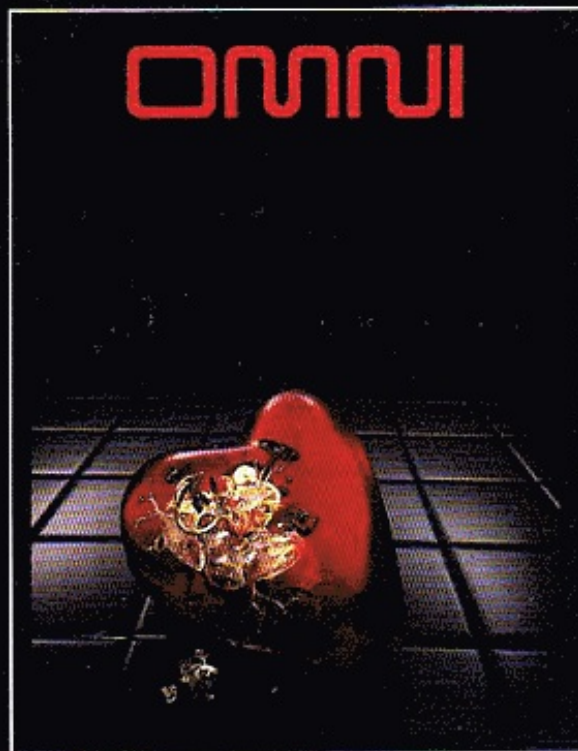
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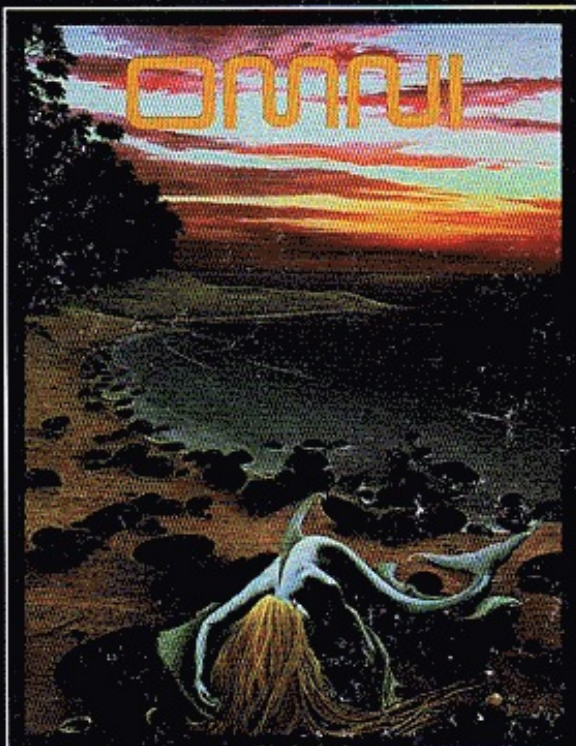
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